The New Criterion

February 1992

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Volume 10, Number 6, $4.75

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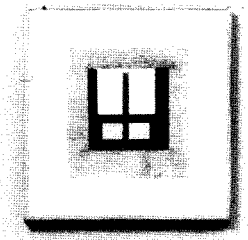

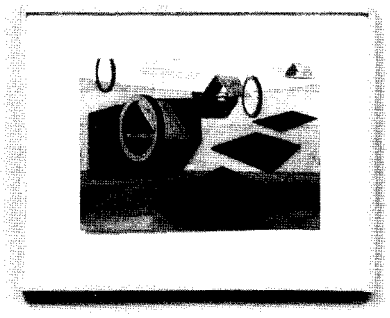
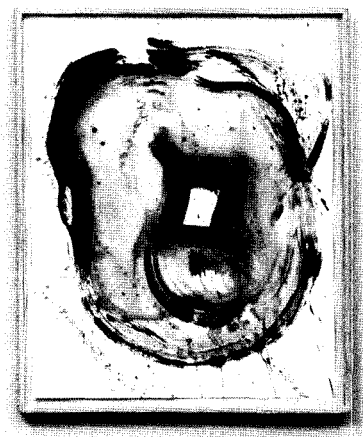

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The New Criterion *February 1992*

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Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. February 1992, Volume 10, Number 6. Subscriptions: $36 for one year, $65 for two. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. Copyright © 1992 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, OH 44870. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date.

Advertising representative: Kate Shanley, 799 Broadway, Room 226, New York, NY 10003. (212) 477-4905.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set with the Flexicon Composer from Emerging Technology and is printed by Science Press of Ephrata, Pennsylvania.

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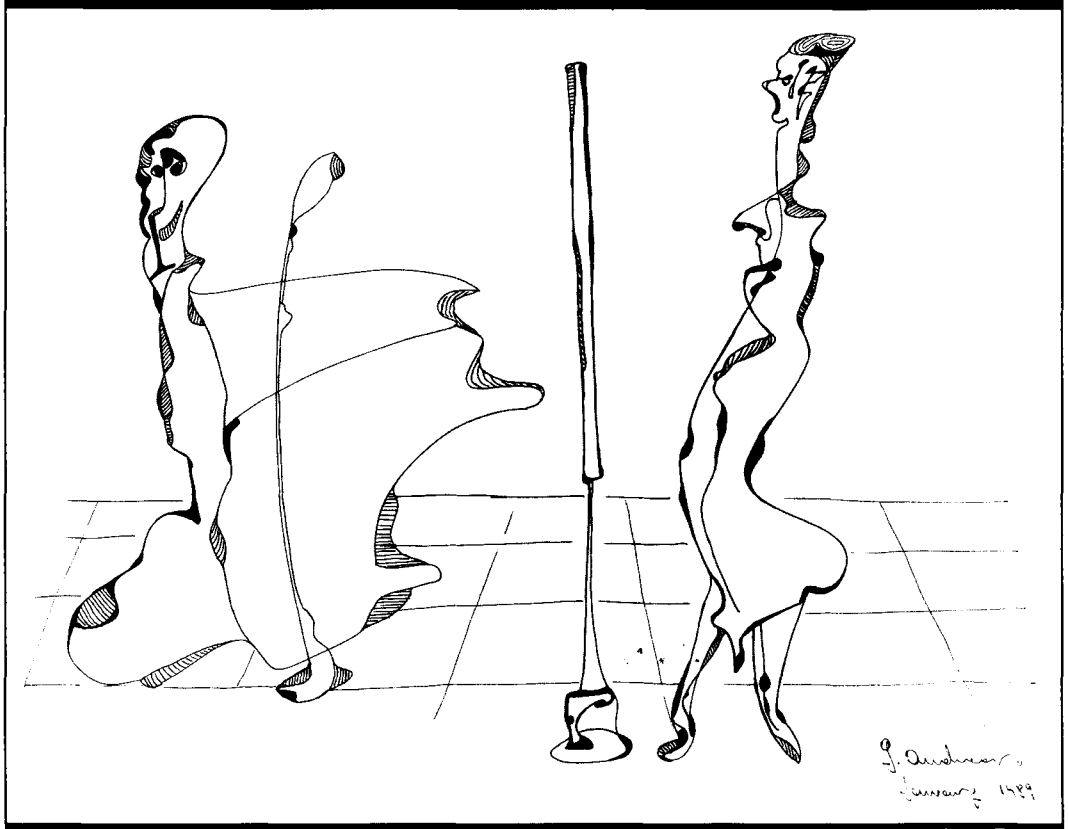

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Notes & Comments: February 1992

A strategy of denial

The signs and portents are now unmistakable. In the accelerating saga of political correctness on American college and university campuses, this season has brought a significant shift in the strategy of the academic Left to secure and expand its political hold on teaching and administrative appointments—and thus on the whole system of policy, promotion, and preferment—in the humanistic disciplines.

What we are witnessing is a public-relations campaign designed to deny that the phenomenon of political correctness even exists. And it is very much a part of this strategy of denial to claim that the widespread discussion of political correctness that has recently taken place in the media is simply the result of what a headline in *The Washington Post* last month called "right-wing disinformation." According to this disingenuous scenario, there is no such thing as political correctness either on the campuses or in the classrooms of our colleges and universities. The contention that efforts to enforce politically correct attitudes and behavior are rampant in the academy are nothing but a vicious invention of what, in the *Post*'s account of this season's meeting of the Modern Language Association, was described as "misinformation propagated by right-wing scholars, think tanks, and commentators."

The same *Post* report offered some prime examples of this new strategy at work. For instance, the incoming president of the MLA—Houston Baker, a professor of African-American literature at the University of Pennsylvania—was quoted as follows on the subject of political correctness: "It is someone else's invention. I'd have to send you to someone else to understand it. It is not something I understand." Catharine R. Stimpson of Rutgers University, herself a past president of the MLA, provided us with an even more egregious example of denial. Long a vociferous champion of politically correct orthodoxy at innumerable forums, conferences, and panel discussions, Professor Stimpson blithely confessed to the *Post* that "I'm about as left-wing as Barbara Bush." Now, for anyone familiar with Professor Stimpson's record of political advocacy, this would be hilarious, indeed a prime example of political camp, were it not such a flagrant denial of the truth.

As this well-organized campaign to induce a kind of historical amnesia about political correctness unfolds, it is more important than ever to recall the precise origin of the term, which emerged in the later years of the 1980s to describe a new political develop-

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ment. Far from being the product of "right-wing disinformation," PC was in fact a spontaneous coinage of the undergraduate students who were its first victims—a response to the new prohibitions on speech and thought that were initiated by administrative edict and classroom rule. One of the first widely recognized expressions of this rebellion came to us from Brown University, itself a citadel of political rectitude, in the form of the satirical cartoon strip "Thatch." Created by Jeff Shesol, then an undergraduate at Brown, the strip featured the absurd divagations of a character called "Politically Correct Person." "Thatch" can hardly be called a project of conservative "misinformation." Neither can the official catechism of politically correct speech that the Smith College administration handed out to all incoming students. This extraordinary document, entitled "Specific Manifestations of Oppression," warned the entire Smith community against a wide range of unacceptable prejudices, including the prejudice of "lookism," i.e., the reactionary belief that some people are more attractive than others. Such developments—the one critical of the rising PC orthodoxy on American campuses, the other a blunt instrument designed to enforce it—were, each in its own way, an accurate measure of the thought-control mechanisms that had already become commonplace in our colleges and universities by the end of the 1980s.

Why, starting around 1990, did the media finally awaken to the effects of this devastating political movement, which has drastically curtailed freedom of speech and debate on American campuses? It was certainly not because of any "right-wing" conspiracy. On the contrary, the outcry against political correctness—now openly allied with the ideology of multiculturalism that is sweeping our schools and universities—occurred primarily because the intolerance it signified had become so blatant that its discussion could no longer be contained or controlled by the academic radicals who were responsible for its existence. Once the news got out, it was inevitable that it would be argued about and resisted. Conservative critics, including some contributors to *The New Criterion,* were the first to sound the alarm about what was happening on the PC front, and their record on this issue is something to be proud of. But recent coverage of political correctness has included reports from such bastions of liberalism as *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Review of Books*, "The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour," and the Public Broadcasting Service. To suggest, as the academic commissars at the MLA and elsewhere are doing, that the media have been duped in this matter by a tiny band of conservative writers is not only a denial of the truth but also the most cynical attempt at disinformation we have witnessed in years. What this development undoubtedly means is that the leaders of the academic Left in this country have now abandoned open debate on the question of political correctness in favor of a strategy of Big Lie propaganda and slanderous scapegoating.

It was the English conservative writer Paul Johnson who last year called the movement for political correctness an example of "liberal fascism." The signs are now numerous—not only in this strategy of denial but also in the increased intolerance of dissenting views in the academy—that the leaders of the movement are more than ever determined to live up to this description.

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The criticism of André Levinson

by Hilton Kramer

What makes a picture, symphony or novel a work of art? Above all, it is a fabrication, a new reality imagined and created by the artist. This fiction *is accomplished by the selection of elements that nature offers—colors, masses, emotions and tones, and their regrouping according to an arbitrary arrangement. The choice of these empirical factors, and their ordering—balance of masses, harmony of proportions, musical or visual rhythm—everything, in short, which establishes mutual relationships between the parts of an object—are the property of a work of art which, by this name, becomes a cosmic thing. A third phase, equally important, concludes this effort at abstraction. A work of art is isolated from its surroundings, circumscribed by the limits of its form. Accordingly, every painting is, first of all, put upon a symmetrical surface. The* frame *attests that the isolation of this microcosm within it is a painting. Art encloses the infinity of phenomena in the finite quality of form. It is, then, the degree of abstraction, of stylization, which determines the hierarchy of the arts. The more complete the transposition —the principles of immediate reality finding themselves eliminated and replaced by equivalents—the more sovereign is the work.*
—André Levinson, 1929

The name of the Russian-born critic André Levinson (1887-1933) is nowadays known, if at all, only to the world of ballet experts, where he has long been recognized as a writer of immense intellectual authority. The publication of a volume of his writings on dance from the 1920s amply confirms this high judgment while at the same time suggesting that the scope of Levinson's critical achievement was a good deal larger than it has generally been understood to be.[1] Arnold Haskell, writing about Levinson in *Balletomania Then and Now* (1977), gave us a good, if incomplete, summary of what his career mainly encompassed.

> A *Russian* ballet and art critic, pupil of [Akim] Volynsky, after the Revolution [Levinson] became one of the leading *French* writers on music, painting, literature, and the drama, and a superb stylist in the language of Voltaire. On ballet he stood supreme.

Yet, after reading both the excellent introduction to *André Levinson on Dance* by Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola and their extensive bibliography of Levinson's voluminous writings in many fields, one can see that even Haskell's praise falls short of giving us a full account of his critical range. The passage I have quoted as an epigraph to this essay is drawn, for example, from Levinson's reflections on "The Nature of the Cinema," still another field of artistic endeavor to which he brought his stringent intelligence. This, by

1 *André Levinson on Dance: Writings from Paris in the Twenties*, edited, with an introduction, by Joan Acocella & Lynn Garafola; Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 163 pages, $25.

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the way, is the only non-dance article that Acocella and Garafola have included in this new volume.

As this passage from "The Nature of the Cinema" vividly attests, Levinson was a critic of firm aesthetic principles. While his interest in radical artistic innovation never flagged—and in his generation, such innovation was frequent and momentous—he remained a classicist, a purist, and an aesthete in his general outlook on art. This did not prevent him from responding to non-traditional dance with his customary critical acumen. Some of the most brilliant observations in this new volume are addressed to the work of Isadora Duncan, Josephine Baker, and Mary Wigman. In literature, too, Levinson's interests carried him into areas that were unusual for a European critic of his day. In 1929, the same year that he published his study of the great nineteenth-century dancer Marie Taglioni, Levinson, a devoted disciple of Mallarmé, also brought out a volume on contemporary American writers—*Figures Américaines*, which included essays on Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O'Neill, and Sinclair Lewis. (Levinson was said to have had a command of ten languages.) Two years later he published a biography of Dostoevsky.

Levinson was clearly a formidable figure, and it is interesting to be reminded, as we are by Acocella and Garafola, that he was once better known to American readers than he is today. All but one of the essays that they have brought together in *André Levinson on Dance* were published in English in *Theatre Arts Monthly* in New York. The sole exception—an essay called "Some Commonplaces on the Dance," which recapitulates the main line of argument in his first book on dance, *Ballet Old and New* (Petrograd, 1918)—was published in English in the American expatriate magazine *Broom* in 1922.[2] The other, more important, American connection is with Lincoln Kirstein and American ballet. Levinson was a cardinal influence on Kirstein's thinking about dance, and thus on his decision to bring George Balanchine to America.

> Levinson's adamantine classicism [write Acocella and Garafola in their introduction], his exaltation of history and tradition, his concern with the school, his passionate love of the technique and his discernment within it of a promise of transcendence, his corresponding disdain for most modern dance as a school-less, history-less, technique-less welter of inconsequential personal expression: all these ideas are as forcibly expressed by Kirstein as by Levinson. . . . Levinson served as a link between Kirstein and Balanchine—which means, in turn, that Levinson is a critical link between American and Russian ballet, between the new classicism that took root on American soil and the old classicism from which it came.

What, then, was the essential aesthetic character of the classicism that Levinson so vehemently espoused in his criticism? One answer to this question is to be found in Levinson's essay on "The Idea of the Dance: From Aristotle to Mallarmé." Levinson commanded immense erudition on this subject, and it always irked him that the Greek origins of classical dancing were so little understood by those who rebelled against it. (It was one of the things he held against Isadora Duncan, though to her actual performance he was more sympathetic.) Levinson himself certainly grasped the complexity of the tradition that meant so much to him.

> Ever since the students of the Renaissance created the ballet, inspired by the *Orchesis* of the Greeks [he wrote in "The Idea of the Dance"], there have been two elements vying for supremacy in the dance: movement and story, abstract form and pure expression, execution and pantomime. Down to our own day the balance between these two tendencies remains unstable.

What Levinson's classicism upheld as an aesthetic ideal was precisely this preference for

2 *Ballet Old and New*, translated from the Russian by Susan Cook Summer, was published by Dance Horizons, New York, in 1982.

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"movement," "abstract form," and "execution," against everything associated with what he called "realism" or "pantomime"; and what he especially admired in Mallarmé's writings on the ballet was the poet's clear comprehension of this vital point. "Mallarmé does not neglect pantomime," Levinson writes. "But he recognizes that there is an essential difference between the gestures through which the mime expresses his emotion and the dancer's steps, the alphabet of the inexpressible. Pantomime and ballet are for him two different and separate forms of art." Which indeed they always were for Levinson.

It was in his great essay on "The Spirit of the Classic Dance" that Levinson made his most ambitious attempt to define the aesthetic of classical ballet, and this inevitably entailed both a discussion of the difficulties of the task and a detailed account of ballet technique.

> The technique of a dancer [he writes] is not like the mechanical workings of a disjointed doll; it is physical effort constantly informed by beauty. This technique is no supplementary reënforcement to his art, nor is it a mere device, designed to gain easy applause. . . . It is the very soul of the dance; it *is* the dance itself.

The emergence in the eighteenth century of what Levinson called "the vertical conception of dancing—the configuration of motion in space"—was for him the crucial artistic event in this tradition, which brought to ballet "a realization of that essential principle and point of departure of classic choreography which took two centuries to prevail—that of turning the body—and more particularly the legs of the dancer—outward from its center."

Levinson then introduces an illuminating comparison between this tradition and that of oriental dance.

> The movement of the oriental dance is concentric. The knees almost instinctively come together and bend, the curved arms embrace the body. Everything is pulled together. Everything converges. The movement of classic dance, on the other hand, is ex-centric—the arms and the legs stretch out, freeing themselves from the torso, expanding the chest. The whole region of the dancer's being, body and soul, is dilated. The actual manifestation of this can be readily seen or even better felt in the trained body of a classical ballet dancer. The dancer spreads the hips and rotates both legs, in their entire length from the waist down, away from each other, outward from the body's centre, so that they are both in profile to the audience although turned in opposite directions. The so-called five fundamental positions are merely derivations or variations of this outward turning posture, differentiated by the manner in which the two feet fit in, cross or by the distance that separates them. In the fifth position, where the two feet are completely crossed, toes to heels, you have the very incarnation of this principle of turning outward—that is to say, of the spirit of classic dancing.

Levinson then proceeds to trace the relation that obtains between technique and form:

> The dancer then is a body moving in space according to any desired rhythm. We have seen how the turning outward of the body increases this space to an extraordinary degree, pushing back the invisible walls of that cylinder of air in the centre of which the dancer moves, giving him that extraordinary extension of body which is totally lacking in oriental dancing and multiplying to an infinite degree the direction of the movement as well as its various conformations. It surrounds the vertical of the body's equilibrium by a vortex of curves, segments of circles, arcs; it projects the body of the dancer into magnificent parabolas, curves it into a living spiral; it creates a whole world of animated forms that awake in us a throng of active sensations, that our usual mode of life has atrophied.

He knew, too, what the human cost of this effort to conform to an artistic ideal entailed.

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> To discipline the body to this ideal function, to make a dancer of a graceful child, it is necessary to begin by dehumanizing him, or rather by overcoming the habits of ordinary life. His muscles learn to bend, his legs are trained to turn outward from the waist, in order to increase the resources of his equilibrium. His torso becomes a completely plastic body. His limbs stir only as a part of an ensemble movement. His entire outline takes on an abstract and symmetrical quality. The accomplished dancer is an artificial being, an instrument of precision, and he is forced to undergo rigorous daily exercise to avoid lapsing into his original purely human state.

Thus it is, Levinson concludes, "that an exalted aim transforms his mechanical efforts into an aesthetic phenomenon."

It was, of course, because for him, as for Mallarmé, "pantomime and ballet are . . . two different and separate forms of art" that Levinson became such a severe critic of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Much that is now uncritically admired about the Ballets Russes —Diaghilev's use of modern painters and composers and the mixture of pantomime and ballet that governed so much of the celebrated choreography—was, in Levinson's eyes, a corruption of the classical ideal. He admired Diaghilev's dancers more than he did his governing aesthetic, which he saw as something of a betrayal. He wrote about those dancers with extraordinary sympathy and precision, while often deploring the productions in which they performed. If this made Levinson something of an aesthetic "conservative" in his ballet criticism, it is well to remember that it was precisely upon this commitment to the *un*corrupted ideal of classical dancing that George Balanchine established *his* artistic achievement in America. In this matter, as in some others, it is often difficult to determine who is "conservative" and who "radical," for in the American context, certainly, Balanchine accomplished one of the most radical reforms in the art of his time.[3]

Still, Acocella and Garafola are undoubtedly correct in the way they place Levinson's writings in the criticism of his period.

> Levinson's classicism [they write] aligns him powerfully with the classical revival of the late 1910s and the 1920s—with T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," with T. E. Hulme's "Romanticism and Classicism," with the efforts of the highly influential *Nouvelle Revue Française*, under such men as André Gide, Henri Ghéon, and Jacques Rivière, to restore classical values such as clarity and purity to French art and criticism, with the so-called neoclassical periods of Stravinsky and Picasso after World War I.

They are also correct in pointing out that Levinson "never embraced the kind of unsavory nationalism, let alone the proto-Fascist ideology, that sometimes accompanied this classicism." He was vehemently anti-Bolshevik, however, and no epithet in his critical lexicon was more condemnatory than the term "Marxist dancing," which, alas, he did not always use with precision. Levinson belonged to the pre-Revolutionary liberal intelligentsia in Russia, and was himself a model of its cosmopolitan culture and high artistic ideals. It was not to be expected that he would look with favor upon the kind of Soviet culture that supplanted almost everything he most admired in the arts—and indeed, in life. In France, to which he emigrated with his wife and daughter in the early Twenties, he wrote some fierce attacks on the Soviet regime and its apologists

3 It is worth noting that the sympathetic understanding of Levinson's criticism so evident in Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola's introduction and headnotes to *André Levinson on Dance* is somewhat different in spirit from the cool, almost hostile, attitude toward the critic in Lynn Garafola's recent study of the Ballets Russes—*Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (Knopf, 1989). Though frequently quoted in this book, Levinson's criticisms of Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes are rarely, if ever, seriously addressed. One cannot help wondering if this is perhaps a case of a "progressive" historian bridling, albeit silently, over the aesthetic distinctions of a "formalist" critic.

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among French intellectuals—writings that, as Acocella and Garafola point out, "won Levinson much trouble." This trouble really exploded into open warfare when, in 1930, Levinson published in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* an intensely critical obituary of Mayakovsky on the occasion of the poet's suicide.

> In putting a bullet through his head [Levinson wrote], Mayakovsky made use of the last and only means he had of regaining the freedom that he had renounced . . .; at the same time he bought back, at the highest price a man can pay, ten years of voluntary servitude and all his betrayals of the Muse. By this final act, unforeseen denouement of a life without honor, he reinstated himself as a *poet* in the eyes of posterity.

As might have been expected in Paris in 1930, all hell broke loose. According to Acocella and Garafola,

> This piece drew a letter signed by 113 artists and intellectuals, including Picasso, Léger, Tristan Tzara, André Malraux, Natalia Goncharova, Michel Larionov, Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy, Jacques Lipchitz, Gaston Gallimard, Blaise Cendrars, Pierre-Jean Jouve, and Gustave Kahn—a sort of *Who's Who* of Parisian modernism—expressing "shock that one of the great French literary journals should have published a libel that was only a pretext for the author to express his Russian-emigré rancor."

There were death threats as well as protests, but Levinson persisted in his attack by pointing out to the readers of *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* that while he had been the first to write about many Soviet authors in France, he saw no reason to overlook "the distortions wrought in their art—and sometimes in their characters—by the Soviet regime's suppression of all freedom of thought and of the press. . . ." The fact is, on political matters as well as artistic ones, Levinson acquitted himself with honor by having the courage to write then what in our day have become the commonplaces of history.

It remains to point out, too, Levinson's critical perspicacity in writing about the kind of non-traditional dance that deviated so radically from his beloved classical canon. One of his most remarkable essays, in this respect, is "The Negro Dance," published in 1927. The young Josephine Baker is the admired center of attention in this essay, but, as was customary with Levinson, he placed this subject, too, in a large aesthetic context.

> Just as we might gain a clearer understanding of the peculiar composition of a jazz band by contrasting it with the more familiar symphonic orchestra, in the same way we may obtain a better idea of the Negro "steps" if we compare them to the dancing of the classic school which has been developed in the West through centuries of elaboration and selection. Such a contrast of black and white will, I believe, serve to emphasize the essential characteristics of the Negro dance.

Levinson then goes on the analyze this contrast by comparing what he calls the "silent art" of classic ballet with dance that is "an instrument of percussion." Whereas in classic ballet, "The harmony between the movement of the body and the rhythm of the music is constant but tacit," Levinson wrote, "the Negro 'steps' . . . is based upon a direct and audible expression of the rhythm" of the music. Such dance, he writes, is "primarily a staccato of feet, scanning the music—all the more striking because of its rapidity and clear articulation."

> The first aim of any dance of this kind is an intense and penetrating reproduction of some rhythmic formula, although, for the sake of contrast, it sometimes introduces the most pearly of pianissimos. The primitive, human instinct is violently affected by such rhythmic insistence. The monotony of this measured tramping, the symmetry of its pattern, has the effect of a narcotic, while its gradual acceleration brings about a sense of exhilaration amounting to a positive ecstasy. The drummer, who is the soul of any genuine Jazz band, is essentially a dancer.

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As for Josephine Baker, Levinson wrote:

> It was she who led the spell-bound drummer and the fascinated saxophonist in the harsh rhythm of the "blues." It was as though the jazz, catching on the wing the vibrations of this mad body, were interpreting, word by word, its fantastic monologue. This music is born from the dance, and what a dance! . . . It was no longer a grotesque dancing girl that stood before [the audience], but the black Venus that haunted Baudelaire. The dancer's personality had transcended the character of her dance.

Levinson, it should also be noted, devoted a good deal of literary criticism to the work of black American writers—among them, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Eric Walrond, and Alain Locke's anthology called *The New Negro*. "Levinson," write Acocella and Garafola, "may have known more, and thought more seriously, about Afro-American literature than any other reviewer of the time in France."

Clearly, André Levinson was one of the best critics of his time anywhere, the publication of this volume of his dance writings from the Twenties is a welcome event. What is needed now, however, is some kind of *André Levinson Reader* that will bring together the most important of his writings in all fields—and not excluding, one hopes, that blistering obituary of Mayakovsky. On the principle that only good criticism is capable of driving out the bad, of which we have such a surfeit these days, such a collection is urgently needed.

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Francis Fukuyama and the end of History

by Roger Kimball

[T]he whig historian can draw lines through certain events, . . . and if he is not careful he begins to forget that this line is merely a mental trick of his; he comes to imagine that it represents something like a line of causation. The total result of this method is to impose a certain form upon the whole historical story, and to produce a scheme of general history which is bound to converge beautifully upon the present—all demonstrating throughout the ages the workings of an obvious principle of progress.

—Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*

"If this is the best of all possible worlds," he said to himself, "what can the rest be like?"

—Voltaire, *Candide*

It is difficult to remember an article in an intellectual political quarterly that made as big a splash as did Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History?" when it appeared in the Summer 1989 issue of *The National Interest*. While the response was far from unanimously favorable, it was extraordinarily large and passionate. Such prominent figures as Allan Bloom, Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Samuel P. Huntington, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote in the pages of *The National Interest* to comment on the fifteen-page piece. The article became something of a cause célèbre, attracting heated commentary across the U.S. as well as in Europe, Asia, and South America. Its millenarian title, sans question mark, soon became a slogan to be bruited about in Washington think tanks, the press, and the academy. The young Mr. Fukuyama, then a deputy director of the U.S. State Department's Policy Planning Staff, quickly emerged as a minor celebrity, replete with a position at the RAND corporation and a generous book contract allowing him to expand on his ideas. Even those who took issue with the article—"I don't believe a word of it," was Irving Kristol's rejoinder to its main thesis—were careful to praise the author's intellectual sophistication. Rarely has the word "brilliant" been used with such cheery abandon: perhaps here, in the response to "The End of History?", were those "thousand points of light" we had been hearing so much about at the time.

Why the fuss? Writing at a moment when Communisim was everywhere in retreat, it was hardly surprising that Mr. Fukuyama should have proclaimed the end of the Cold War and "unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism." Such proclamations were already legion. What commanded attention was something far more radical. Claiming to distinguish between "what is essential and what is contingent or accidental in world history," Mr. Fukuyama wrote that

> What we are witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or a passing of a particular peri-

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> od of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.

"The end of history as such," "the evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government": these were the sorts of statements—along with Mr. Fukuyama's professed conviction that "the ideal will govern the material world *in the long run*"—that rang the alarm.

Some of the negative responses to Mr. Fukuyama's article, as he was quick to point out, were based on a simplistic misreading of his thesis. For in proclaiming that the end of history had arrived in the form of triumphant liberal democracy, Mr. Fukuyama did not mean that the world would henceforth be free from tumult, political contention, or intractable social problems. Moreover, he was careful to note that "the victory of liberalism has occured primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world."

What he did maintain, however, was that liberal democracy was the best conceivable social-political system for fostering freedom; and therefore—because "the ideal will govern the material world *in the long run*"—he also claimed that liberal democracy would not be superseded by a better or "higher" form of government. According to Mr. Fukuyama, other forms of government, from monarchy to communism to fascism, had failed because they were imperfect vehicles for freedom; liberal democracy, allowing mankind the greatest freedom possible, had triumphed because it best instantiated the ideal. In this sense, what Mr. Fukuyama envisaged was not the end of history—understood as the lower-case realm of daily occasions and events—but the end of History: an evolutionary process that represented freedom's self-realization in the world. The "end" he had in mind was in the nature of a *telos*: more "fulfillment" than "completion" or "finish."

True, one might still ask whether the career of History so understood is anything more than a speculative fancy—whether, indeed, the ambition to distinguish between "what is essential and what is contingent or accidental in world history" is not bootless, given man's limited vision and imperfect knowledge. In any event, the idea of the end of History is hardly novel. In one form or another, it is a component of many myths and religions—including Christianity, with its vision of the Second Coming. And anyone familiar with the interstices of nineteenth-century German philosophy will remember that the end of History also figures prominently in the philosophies of G. W. F. Hegel and his disgruntled follower Karl Marx. It is perhaps worth noting, too, that one important difference between most religious speculation about the end of History and versions propagated by philosophers is hubris: orthodox Christianity, for example, is gratifyingly indefinite about the date of this eventuality. Hegel harbored no such doubts or hesitations. What he called "*the last stage of History, our world, our own time*" was ushered in by Napoleon's armies at the Battle of Jena in October 1806. "As early as this," Mr. Fukuyama writes, "Hegel saw . . . the victory of the ideals of the French revolution, and the imminent universalization of the state incorporating the principles of liberal democracy." It is Mr. Fukuyama's view that "the present world seems to confirm that the fundamental principles of socio-political organization have not advanced terribly far since 1806."

As Mr. Fukuyama acknowledges, the philosophy of Hegel, especially as interpreted by the Russian-born Marxist philosopher and French bureaucrat Alexandre Kojève, was the chief theoretical inspiration for "The End of History?" Whatever else can be said of Hegel's philosophy, or its interpretation by Kojève, there can be no doubt that it demands an extraordinarily cerebral view of the world. In the famous lectures that he gave in the 1930s on Hegel's first book, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Kojève tells us that History "cannot be *truly* understood with-

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out the *Phenomenology*," and, moreover, that "there is History *because* there is philosophy and *in order that* there may be Philosophy." For those less persuaded of philosophy's determinative importance in human affairs, such statements may help explain why Hegel, in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, should have defined "the true" as *der bacchantische Taumel, an dem kein Glied nicht trunken ist*: "the Bacchanalian whirl in which no member is not drunk." Inebriation of some sort, at any rate, would seem desirable when entering such heady waters.

Curiously, Mr. Fukuyama's attitude toward the end of History is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, faithful Hegelian that he is, he regards it as the final triumph of freedom. He speaks of nations or parts of the world that are still "stuck in history" or "mired in history," as if residence in the realm of history were something it behooved us to change. On the other hand, he foresees that "the end of history will be a very sad time," partly because he believes that the things that once called forth "daring, courage, imagination, and idealism will be replaced by economic calculation," and partly because "in the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history." Thus he acknowledges "a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed" and even suggests that the prospect of perpetual ennui that awaits mankind "after" History may "serve to get history started once again."

When we turn to Mr. Fukuyama's new book on this subject,[1] we find that he has collected a number of careful hedges and qualifications to place around the ideas he put forward in "The End of History?" For example, he continues to insist that there has been "a common evolutionary pattern for *all* human societies—in short, something like a Universal History of mankind in the direction of liberal democracy." But instead of presenting this Universal History as the record of an ineluctable dialectic, he now admits that it is "simply an intellectual tool." Early on in *The End of History and the Last Man*, Mr. Fukuyama repeats his claim that

> We cannot picture to ourselves a world that is *essentially* different from the present one, and at the same time better. Other, less reflective ages also thought of themselves as the best, but we arrive at this conclusion exhausted, as it were, from the pursuit of alternatives we felt *had* to be better than liberal democracy.

But at the very end of his book he hesitates, suggesting that the evidence for necessary progress—evidence that the "wagon train" of history is moving in the right direction, that the lead wagons have in fact reached their destination—is "provisionally inconclusive." The generous response to such tensions is that they render Mr. Fukuyama's discussion richer and more nuanced; the skeptical response is that, in an effort to answer his critics, he has opened himself to the charge of inconsistency on fundamental issues.

Mr. Fukuyama claims at the outset that *The End of History* is not simply a restatement of his famous article. Perhaps, then, we should call it a re-presentation and expansion of the ideas he articulated in "The End of History?" Divided into four parts and some thirty chapters, the book painstakingly presents the case that history possesses a structure and direction, that the direction is up, and that we in the liberal West occupy the final summit of the historical edifice. What's new is a lot of detailed philosophical discussion. Mr. Fukuyama provides a summary of Plato's speculations about the origin of our sense of honor and shame as well as a long discussion of the famous master/slave dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Following Hegel, he presents the "struggle for recognition" as the "longing" that drives history, and concludes that liberal democracy offers the most complete and "rational" satisfaction of that longing possible. The last

1 *The End of History and the Last Man*, by Francis Fukuyama; Free Press, 418 pages, $24.95.

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part of the book is essentially a meditation on his claim that the end of history will be "a very sad time." Mr. Fukuyama is particularly worried that the satisfactions of living at the end of history will leave mankind so dull and complacent that his spiritual life will atrophy and he will find himself transformed into that flaccid creature, Nietzsche's "last man," described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as "the most despicable man" who is "no longer able to despise himself."

Like the article that occasioned it, *The End of History* also provides two quite disparate views of the world. On one side we have Mr. Fukuyama the conservative political analyst, commenting in lithe, well-informed prose on the state of the world. This gentleman is hardheaded, wry, and full of quietly witty obiter dicta. "In America today," he writes, "we feel entitled to criticize another person's smoking habits, but not his or her religious beliefs or moral behavior." Moreover, this Mr. Fukuyama recognizes that, whether or not we are at the end of History, nothing has happened to cancel a nation's need for vigilence: "no state that values its independence," he insists, "can ignore the need for defense modernization." Indeed, one imagines that he would accede wholeheartedly to the wise observation of the Roman military commentator Flavius Vegetius: *si vis pacem, para bellum* ("If you want peace, prepare for war"). One is not surprised to find endorsements on the book jacket from such well-known figures as Charles Krauthammer, George F. Will, and Eduard Shevardnadze.

On the other side we have Mr. Fukuyama the philosopher, impressively erudite, deeply committed to a neo-Hegelian view of the historical process. This Mr. Fukuyama seems to put greater stock in ideas than facts (indeed, one suspects that he would scorn the distinction between ideas and facts as an artificial construct). He speaks often about "the motor" or "directionality" of history, "internal contradictions" that must be overcome, and "the complete absence of coherent *theoretical* alternatives to liberal democracy." He even suggests that "the present form of social and political organization is *completely satisfying* to human beings in their most essential characteristics." It is not quite clear what the Messrs. Fukuyama have to say to each other, though their co-habitation clearly makes for sensational copy.

We have nothing but good wishes for Fukuyama 1; about Fukuyama 2, however, we have grave reservations, not least because of the threat his ideas pose to his more commonsensical twin.

Like most world-explaining constructions invented by humanity, Hegel's dialectic acts as catnip on susceptible souls. Once one is seduced, everything seems marvelously clear and, above all, *necessary*: all important questions have been answered beforehand and the only real task is to apply the method to clean up the untoward messiness of reality. It is very exiciting. "All of the really big questions," as Mr. Fukuyama puts it in his preface, "had been settled." But the problem with such constructs is that they insulate their adherents from empirical reality: since everything unfolds "necessarily" according to a preordained plan, nothing that merely *happens* in the world can alter the itinerary. As the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski observed in his book *Religion*,

> Monistic reductions in general anthropology or "historiosophy" are always successful and convincing; a Hegelian, a Freudian, a Marxist, and an Adlerian are, each of them, safe from refutation as long as he is consistently immured in his dogma and does not try to soften it or make concessions to common sense; his explanatory device will work forever.

What one gains is an explanation; what one loses is the truth. There are good reasons—from the rise of multiculturalism to the state once known as Yugoslavia—to believe that what we are witnessing today is not the final consolidation of liberal democracy but the birth of a new tribalism. For those committed to the end of History, however, it's simply that "the victory of liberalism has occured primarily in the realm

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of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world."

Among the unpleasant side effects of adherence to such doctrines is the habit of intellectual arrogance. Hegel offers the supreme case in point. About his "firm and invincible faith that there is Reason in history," for example, the philosopher assures us that his faith "is not a presupposition of study; it is a *result* which happens to be known to myself because I already know the whole." It is cheering to possess knowledge of "the whole," of course, but a bit daunting for the rest of us. Not surprisingly, such arrogance also expresses itself about competing doctrines. Thus we find Mr. Fukuyama, supplementing Hegel with Nietzsche, explaining that "the problem with Christianity . . . is that it remains just another slave ideology, that is, it is untrue in certain crucial respects." How gratifying to be able to docket the whole of Christianity and file it away as an example of mankind's spiritual inmaturity!

Perhaps the most obvious problem with Hegel's philosophy of history is that the "necessary" freedom which his system mandates can look a lot like unfreedom to anyone who happens to disagree with its dictates. As the contemporary German philosopher Hans Blumenberg observes, "If there were an immanent final goal of history, then those who believe they know it and claim to promote its attainment would be legitimized in using all the others who do not know it . . . as a mere means." The twentieth century has acquainted us in terrifyingly exquisite detail with what happens when people are treated as "moments" in an impersonal dialectic. We find ourselves in a situation where "real freedom," as Hegel puts it, demands the "subjugation of mere contingent will." It is hardly surprsing that Leszek Kolakowski, writing about Hegel in *Main Currents of Marxism*, should conclude that "in the Hegelian system humanity becomes what it is, or achieves unity with itself, only by ceasing to be humanity." Once again, the contrast with Christianity is illuminating. For while the good Christian, too, believes that freedom consists in the "subjugation of mere contingent will," he endeavors to act not in accordance with "the Idea" as formulated by a nineteenth-century German philosopher but with God's will. Moreover, while Hegel insists that with the formulation of his philosophy "the antithesis between the universal and the individual will has been removed," Christianity has had the good manners to attribute a large dollop of inscrutibility to God's will. By refusing to saddle mankind with "necessary freedom," Christianity preserves a large domain for the exercise of individual freedom in everyday life.

Mr. Fukuyama's commitment to the Hegelian dialectic leads him to some strange inversions. Early on in his book, he remarks that "it is possible to speak of historical progress only if one knows where mankind is going." But is this so? Is it not rather that what one needs in order to discern progress is knowledge of where mankind has *been*, not where it is going? And in any case, whom should we trust to furnish us with accurate reports about where mankind is going? Is G. W. F. Hegel, for all his genius, really a reliable guide? Is Mr. Fukuyama? No: history, a humble account of how man has lived and suffered, is what we require to declare progress, not prophecy.

It is important to stress that the issue is not whether mankind has made progress over the millennia. Surely it has. The exact nature and extent of the progress can be measured in any number of ways. The material progress of mankind has been staggering, especially in the last two hundred years. Ditto for mankind's political progress, despite the tyrannies and despotisms that remain. As Mr. Fukuyama points out, in 1790 there were only three liberal democracies in the world: the United States, France, and Switzerland. Today, there are sixty-one. That is remarkable progress. But it is also *contingent* progress, reversible by the same means that accomplished it in the first place: the efforts of individual men and women.

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Indeed, one of the great casualities of Hegel's system is the whole realm of individual initiative. Mr. Fukuyama has told us that "in the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy," precisely because at the end of History nothing remains for those disciplines to accomplish. But how often, even before Hegel, has that end been proclaimed. Gilbert Murray, in *The Classical Tradition in Poetry*, recalled being told that "one of the very earliest poems unearthed in Babylonia contains a lament that all reasonable subjects for literature are already exhausted." And just about the time Hegel was proclaiming the end of History, we find the French painter Eugène Delacroix observing that "Those very ones who believe that everything has been said and done, will greet you as new and yet will close the door behind you. And then they will say again that everything has been done and said."

One of the most serious moral problems with the idea of the end of History is that it implacably transforms everything outside the purview of the theory into a historical "accident" or exception, draining it of moral significance. Hegel's system tells us what has to happen; what actually does happen turns out not to matter much. Mr. Fukuyama admits that "we have no guarantees" that the future will not produce more Hitlers or Pol Pots. But in his view, evil, e.g. the evil which produced the Holocaust, "can slow down but not derail the locomotive of History." More: "At the end of the twentieth century," he writes, "Hitler and Stalin appear to be bypaths of history that led to dead ends, rather than real alternatives for human social organization." But what can this mean? The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was the tragedy that sparked *Candide*, Voltaire's attack on Leibniz's dictum that ours was necessarily "the best of all possible worlds." What philosophical empyrean need one inhabit in order to regard the course of history since 1806 as the reprise of a completed symphony? How far shall we trust a "Universal History" that relegates the conflagrations of two world wars and the unspeakable tyranny of Hitler and Stalin to epiphenomenal "bypaths"? I submit that any theory which regards World War II as a momentary wrinkle on the path of freedom is in need of serious rethinking.

If Mr. Fukuyama's commitment to Hegel is itself problematic, so at times is his interpretation of Hegel's teaching. For it is not at all clear that Hegel himself was a champion of anything like what we call liberal democracy. Mr. Fukuyama complains that people have labeled Hegel "a reactionary apologist for the Prussian monarchy, a forerunner of twentieth-century totalitarianism, and . . . a difficult-to-read metaphysician." Let's grant that the bit about totalitarianism is moot. What about the rest? No one is going to give Hegel a prize for limpid prose. Perhaps, as Mr. Fukuyama says, Hegel was par exellence the "philosopher of freedom." Perhaps. Certainly he talked about freedom a great deal. He was fond, for example, of claiming that "the History of the World is nothing other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom." We must of course hope that that notion is a consolation to the multitudes whom the dialectic has consigned to the uncomfortable (but, alas, necessary) role of unfreedom in the lower-case day-to-day history we all merely live through.

But liberal democracy? No doubt it was just one of those lucky strokes of fortune, an example of life imitating art: still, it is remarkable that "*the Germanic world*" of the nineteenth century should emerge as the political zenith of Hegel's system, *primus inter impares* of "those nations on which the world spirit has conferred its true principle." *Mirabile visu*, convenience once again jibes seamlessly with necessity. But question: was Hegel's Prussia, at the time of Metternich, of Frederick William III, et al., a "liberal democracy"? Did Hegel believe that it was? Mr. Fukuyama is surely correct that to have a liberal democracy, the people must be sovereign. But in *The Philosophy of Right* Hegel seems to think that the sovereign should be sovereign. "The monarch," he tells us, is "the absolute apex of an organi-

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cally developed state," "the ungrounded self-determination in which finality of decision is rooted," etc. He says, further, that constitutional monarchy such as we see in . . . oh, well, in nineteenth-century Prussia, for example, is "the achievement of the modern world, a world in which the substantial Idea has won the infinite form." In other words, he likes it.

Or at least he *appears* to like it. In a footnote, Mr. Fukuyama acknowledges that Hegel overtly supported the Prussian monarchy. He nevertheless maintains that, "far from justifying the Prussian monarchy of his day," Hegel's discussion in *The Philosophy of Right* "can be read as an esoteric critique of actual practice." Presumably, it is by virtue of some such "esoteric critique" that Hegel, champion of the Prussian state, turns out—*truly*, *essentially*—to be an enthuasiast for Kojève's "universal homogenous state," a.k.a. liberal democracy. It is nice work if you can get it.

It may also be worth pointing out a curious inconsistency in Mr. Fukuyama's account of the end of History. If, as Hegel's famous slogan has it, "the real is the rational and the rational is the real," how are we to understand Mr. Fukuyama's "provisional inconclusiveness"? Indeed, how are we to understand his suggestion that nostalgia, or boredom, or evil might "re-start" history? What, is mere nostalgia a match for the imperatives of History? Can boredom contravene "God's walk through the world," as Hegel once described the process of history? If the end of History is a logical and metaphysical necessity, how are we to understand Mr. Fukuyama's hesitations? In fact, his ambivalence contributes greatly to his book's vividness, for it provides a little space for reality to enter. But considered on his own—i.e. Hegel's—terms, Mr. Fukuyama would seem to be a disappointing dialectician.

It should go without saying that none of these criticisms is meant to deny that the Hegelian system possesses tremendous *aesthetic* appeal. The panoramic drama of absolute being struggling to achieve perfect self-knowledge in history: it is an imposing tale of a thousand and one nights for the philosophically inclined. The inconvenient question is only whether the story it tells is true. Perhaps, as Kierkegaard suggested, Hegel was a man who had built a palace but lived in the guard house.

Mr. Fukuyama's own addiction to palace building shows itself in a response to critics that he published in the Winter 1989/90 issue of *The National Interest*. "In order to refute my hypothesis," he writes "it is not sufficient to suggest that the future holds in store large and momentous events. One would have to show that these events were driven by a systematic idea of political and social justice that claimed to supersede liberalism." But this would be the case only if one grants Mr. Fukuyama's premise—that we are in possession of a "systematic idea of political and social justice." In fact, it may be that what we need is not a better theory but less theory.

In this respect, as possibly in others, a good antidote to the Hegelian juggernaut is the mild doctrine of the Spanish-born American philosopher George Santayana. In *Character and Opinion in the United States* (1920), Santayana distinguishes between "English liberty," which is "vague," "reticent," and involves "perpetual compromise," and "absolute liberty," which he describes as "a foolish challenge thrown by a new-born insect buzzing against the universe." "In the end," Santayana suggests, "adaptation to the world at large, where so much is hidden and unintelligible, is only possible piecemeal, by groping with a genuine indetermination in one's aims"—that is, by rejecting the inflated promises of absolute liberty for the more modest satisfactions of local freedom. To the partisan of the Hegelian dialectic or any other "fixed programme or, as he perhaps calls it, an ideal," this capitulation to uncertainty will doubtless seem strange. But the Danish Prince was right: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

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Other people's music: Corigliano at the Met

by John Simon

Comme c'est long!
—Tristan Corbière, "Grand Opéra"

Long in gestation and long in duration, *The Ghosts of Versailles* has arrived at the Metropolitan Opera as one of the most sumptuous productions I have seen on any operatic stage. With music by John Corigliano and a libretto by William M. Hoffman, it is the first new opera commissioned by the Met in a quarter century, or since Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Marvin David Levy's much worse *Mourning Becomes Electra* proved failures. It was twelve years ago, in 1979, that James Levine suggested to Corigliano at a dinner party that he write an opera for the Met's centenary season, 1983-84; the three-hour work did not get written and produced till December 17, 1991, amid considerable hoopla and fanfare. (It had become, along the way, a joint commission with the Chicago Lyric Opera, where it will be seen during the 1995-96 season.) Was it worth the effort, the wait, and the reported four-million-dollar cost?

Corigliano told Levine that he wanted to write an opera buffa; when Levine pointed out that comic operas sometimes get lost in that vast house, Corigliano promised a "grand opera buffa," presumably a new genre. He turned to his long-time friend Hoffman for the text, and made two stipulations: that it lend itself to the use of melody, and that it contain a Turkish scene. There was a craze in late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century music for things Turkish—the Turcomania whose summit achievements were Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algieri*. The request still sounds to me rather like saying "What I want from a friend is good character and bushy eyebrows."

The reason Corigliano wanted to write a funny opera was that "a lot of contemporary opera is for the orchestra; the singer holds a note while the orchestra goes crazy. By definition, if you're writing an opera buffa, you're going to write melodically." Perhaps—although Orff, in *Die Kluge* and *Der Mond*, managed to write comic operas far more rhythmic than melodic. I suspect that the real reason is that Corigliano likes to play musical games—allusion, parody, pastiche—that clearly work only in comedy. Moreover, he and Hoffman wished to make an opera out of Beaumarchais's third Figaro play, *L'autre Tartuffe ou la Mère coupable*, because the two previous plays of the trilogy, *The Barber of Seville* and *Figaro's Marriage*, had done so well by Rossini and Mozart, whose styles Corigliano could kid.

The authors were disappointed both because *The Guilty Mother* turned out to be not a comedy but a melodrama, and because it proved very bad. It concerns the Almavivas twenty years later, when the Count's illegitimate daughter, Florestine, by an unnamed noblewoman, and the Countess's son, Léon, by her one deviation from the straight and narrow with Cherubino while

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her husband was long absent as governor of Mexico, are living in the Almaviva household in Paris, where the Count is the Spanish ambassador. He hates his good and loving Rosina for her one misstep, ignoring his own misbehavior and love child. Léon and Florestine, moreover, are in love, in defiance of what may look like incest.

This fraught family circle is infiltrated by the villainous Irish major Patrick Honoré Bégearss, former secretary to Almaviva and now his false friend who intends to marry Florestine and fleece and ruin the rest of the household. The naïve Count is putty in his hands, but Figaro and his faithful Susanna, after numerous pathetic and melodramatic twists, succeed in unmasking Bégearss, reconciling the Count and Countess, and enabling the young lovers—no blood relations—to marry happily. Even the editor of the *Pléiade* Beaumarchais, Pierre Larthomas, comments that this inferior work is "no longer played, and will doubtless never be." What may have appealed to Corigliano, who, as Michael C. Nott has remarked in *Opera News*, "tends . . . to draw on a wide range of styles—in his view 'techniques' —rather than making any single one the basis of his music," is that the hybrid genre of melodrama, which contains blackly comic evil as well as lily-white sentimentality, could allow him to indulge his penchant for parody or, to put it less kindly, derivativeness. Ambiguity of various kinds can even be read out of Beaumarchais's remark in the preface to his play that he "composed with a straightforward and pure intention: with the cool head of a man and the burning heart of a woman, as has been said of Rousseau. . . . This moral 'hermaphroditism' is less rare than one might think."

I can see where hermaphroditism, moral or other, might appeal to Corigliano and Hoffman, who would perceive it as a justification for trying out their wide range of styles—sorry, techniques. They could thus not only allude to Mozart and Rossini, but also indulge in any verbal and musical hanky-panky to which male heads with female hearts might be prone.

But given the sorry plot, an overplot was needed: Beaumarchais in heaven falls in love with Marie Antoinette, still unresigned and disconsolate, and proposes to write a play to cheer her up, a play that is roughly *La Mère coupable*, with which he undertakes to rewrite history as it should have been: Marie Antoinette escaping the guillotine with the help of Beaumarchais—or his acknowledged alter ego, Figaro—and ending up forever Beaumarchais's beloved. Yet since the Figaro of the play is at first a good Republican and unwilling to help a monarch, Beaumarchais must—at the peril of his eternal salvation, it seems—enter his own creation, the play-within-the-play he has entitled *A Figaro for Antonia*, and take matters into his own hands. This means getting hold of the Queen's famous necklace, which keeps changing hands throughout, and turning it into cash to buy Marie Antoinette's escape. Confusing? Yes. Silly? Definitely.

Three casts intermingle: the ghosts of the dead aristocrats, the characters from *La Mère coupable*, and the populace and soldiers of the Revolution. This means juggling with afterlife (the ghosts), life (the French Revolution), and the life of the drama (Beaumarchais inventing or rewriting his play, trying to change history through art). What is rotating through the air here may be inspired juggling or just plain balls.

Consider, first, this heaven or limbo from which, in the prologue, ghosts are floating down to Versailles. There is nobody here but these dead aristocrats flying, floating, lolling about. There is the odious Woman with Hat, a busybody, and Louis XVI, who keeps playing cards with the Marquis, his confidant, while under his very nose Beaumarchais courts his wife, the Queen, who is called Antonia when that suits the meter of the verse passages, Antoinette when that facilitates the rhyme. After expressing his indifference to the goings-on, and long ignoring them, Louis suddenly challenges Beaumarchais—a commoner—to a duel. They run each other through, but of course cannot die, whereupon the entire ghostly company merrily falls to skewering one another.

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So these *ci-devant* aristocrats and human beings require a couple of centuries to discover there is no carnage in heaven? License, sure; but how poetic? Even fantasy must have its own kind of sense. What good is a chorus of blasé ghosts expressing ennui by takings turns to say they're as bored "as a rug," "as an egg," "as a potato"? Just how bored can a rug get? Eggs, in fact, are full of yolks. Yet these similes, later reduced to mere tags ("rug . . . egg . . . potato") keep cropping up as a refrain any sensible librettist would refrain from.

Marie Antoinette rejects Beaumarchais, whereat he sings, "Orion, Orion, / Even the moon moves / And is laced gently by leaves." What has this to do with the price of eggs, or potatoes? It is pseudo-poeticism for its own debilitating sake. Now Marie Antoinette sings the aria of her tragic destiny, including the stanza about earlier, sweeter memories:

> Once there was a golden bird
> In a garden of silver trees.
> From the garden could be heard
> The laughter of women at their ease.

This provides one of the opera's principal leitmotives, as Patrick J. Smith informs us, especially in the three notes of "golden bird."

Yet how facile and primitive those lines are, what with the simplistic juxtaposition of golden bird and silver trees, and the blandness of it all, with that laughter of *women's* voices, as if men only cackled. Compare this to the real thing, James Agee set by Samuel Barber in *Knoxville: Summer of 1915:* "It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds' hung havens, hangars . . . voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds."

And to Hoffman's insipid words Corigliano provides a tuneless melody where soaring is needed. The melisma on "laughter" is effective but predictable, as are the bits of parlando strewn into the aria, notably the counting of steps to the scaffold, which Teresa Stratas delivered with chilling raucousness: "Three steps. Four. . . . Seven. Eight." But with the horror of those numerals there came across at the Met also the crudeness of Miss Stratas's Bride-of-Frankenstein delivery.

Beaumarchais offers a sample of his play on a stage-within-the-stage. Figaro is dodging pursuing creditors and unwed mothers of his making until he locks them all into a closet and proceeds to deliver a feeble knock-off of the Rossini "Largo al factotum" (which Patrick J. Smith calls "damn near . . . outdoing the Swan of Pesaro"): the patter song of a panting, nearly petered-out Figaro, twenty years older: "My money is low, / My status less than quo. / I'm poor, I'm weak, / My future's rather bleak. / I'm stooped, I'm spent. / I'm almost impotent." Note the flimsy filler words *rather* and *almost*; note also the silliness. Why is Figaro's future rather bleak? Because the librettist says so.

But then an equally arbitrary reversal: "My spirit—/ A vapor deliquescent, / An effervescent liquid / Pervading, invading, taking my body, / Making me fluid, light, buoyant. / I'm sunlight, a moonbeam, / And carefree I fly to the stars." Notice how Hoffman runs out of rhyme where it could be most sustaining, most buoyant. He falls back instead on self-indulgent jingles, "deliquescent-effervescent," "pervading-invading," and—again!—on the good old gold-and-silver standard: "I'm sunlight, a moonbeam." Forthwith Figaro, who has just described himself as "A man for the ladies / And father of babies," becomes a star-trekker as he flies past a litany of star monikers: "Capella, Carmina, / Spica, Auriga, / Libra, Lyra, / Andromeda, / Fornax, Phoenix, / Bellatrix, Pollux. Joy! Joy!" Hear especially the salacious echoes in Fornax, Fel . . . er . . . *Bel*latrix, and the joy-filled ejaculation, "Pollux."

At this point Corigliano's music does

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come to life. Having begun the opera with eerily inchoate sound sequences, serial rows, glissandos, quarter tones, various kinds of inversion—just like the beginning of his Clarinet Concerto—Corigliano, inspired by this journey to the stars, lets go with shimmering, high-register, astral music, reminiscent (this time, I suspect, unintentionally) of the apotheosis music in Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Daphne*) where a transfiguration takes place.

But let us say the Strauss evocation is deliberate pastiche. Such pastiche is a very sly maneuver; if you are skillful about it, your position is impregnable. Familiar-sounding? Of course. Imitative? Why not? Too close for comfort? On the contrary, the comfort is in the closeness, the cleverness of the pastiche, the wit of parody. Indeed, the three chief echoers in the music—Mozart, Rossini, Strauss—keep popping up everywhere, often in direct quotations, but this is made to devolve to Corigliano's credit: What difference is there between playing with notes and playing with other composers' groups of notes? Right?

The Ghosts of Versailles tries to have it every which way. It means to be both grand and buffa, both profound and irreverent, both didactic and campy. "We're dealing with the ghosts of our own cultural tradition," says Hoffman, "Versailles representing the heritage of well-made objects, of beauty. We're dealing with the ghosts of beauty in our Western culture." Yet even while he and Corigliano were working on *Ghosts*, Hoffman (until then best known for his work in soap opera) produced his one claim to fame, the AIDS play *As Is* (1985), in which an aspiring actress posing for publicity shots says to the photographer, "I want that role so bad. I play the ghost of Marie Antoinette. (*taking a tits-and-ass pose*) How do you like this, hon? 'Let them eat . . .'" This smutty joke about its heroine hardly suggests an opera in the making whose preoccupation is with beauty in Western culture.

"As a lyric poet," Hoffman continues, "I was thinking of my goal of beauty, of nobility, as well as fun. . . . This wasn't a romp-through opera. It's not anarchic at all. I was writing lyrics that were meant to be compared to the great lyrics of the past." Which great lyrics? Sappho? Keats? Hofmannsthal? Irving Berlin? And how seemly is it for the music to indulge itself to the extent that where Bégearss exclaims angrily about the success of his rival, "Léon? Léon? LEON!" the music replicates the notes from Ravel's song cycle *Histoires naturelles*, where the peacock utters his cry, "Léon! Léon!"?

Hard upon this follows Bégearss's dastardly credo, "Aria of the Worm," suggested, we are told, by an epic poem by Boito (more scavenging), but which seems to be an attempt to outdo Mussorgsky's "Song of the Flea," while also providing Bégearss with something comparable to Iago's "Credo" in Verdi's *Otello*. Here is what we are to compare to the great lyrics of the past:

> . . . Cut him in two,
> Each part'll renew.
> Slice him to bits,
> The worm persists.
> He still crawls on.
> Scales walls on
> Sheer will, and
> Burrows burning sand.
> Long live the worm.
> He travels on by
> The poor man's sty,
> Groveling past
> The royal palace . . .

Slant rhyme (e.g., "bits-persists") is perfectly fine, but "past-palace" is not slant, or scant, or any kind of rhyme. And what of the subliterate "each part'll renew," without an object, *itself*? And why, except for assonance with *travel*, would the worm *grovel* past the royal palace when the point is the supremacy of the victorious worm?

In the duet where Rosina and Cherubino make love—a retrospect Beaumarchais offers Marie Antoinette as an aphrodisiac—Hoffman emulates the geographical preci-

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osity of Mlle de Scudéry's *Carte de Tendre*, rather too academic for a seduction scene, but the real problem, again, is the lyricism: "Come now, my darling, come with me, / Come to the room I have made for thee. / Let us strew the bed with flowers—/ There we will spend the hours." But the fearless challenger of the great doggerel of the past follows this with even better: "Yes, yes, my darling. I'll come with thee, / Come to the room that is made for me," whereupon they fall to coupling *al fresco.*

Be it noted in passing that a favorite Hoffman trick is to make a line applicable simultaneously to the Almaviva characters and the commenting ghosts, so both can sing it in unison—a trick that palls quickly. It is, however, as nothing to the cuteness of the entire reception scene at the Turkish embassy, where the Count tries to sell the necklace of the Queen to the British ambassador for money to be used for her rescue. Bégearss and his oafish servant, Wilhelm, try to get the necklace away from him, but it is Figaro, in drag as a dancing girl importunately rubbing against the Count, who eventually spirits the necklace away in a scene calculated to delight equally connoisseurs of camp and guileless simpletons.

Indeed, this Turcomanic scene unleashed the evening's noisiest ecstasies. Be it said that the British director, Colin Graham, improved on the authors' campiness with an added layer of his own. The Pasha (Turkish ambassador) was converted into a huge automaton atop a platform in the back, manipulated by five men from below. The doll, thirty feet tall even sitting cross-legged, could roll its eyes, part its lips, clap its hands, and tap one foot as the voice of a basso below (truly *profundo*!) was piped into it. A live page sat in its lap, and at the scene's climax Figaro climbed up on the Pasha's turban, made it explode spectacularly, and escaped in the melee. The scene opened with two enormous, pasha-sized figures of scimitar-wielding swordsmen entertaining the guests; these expensive props were promptly wheeled off and never seen again. Later, when Figaro is supposed to be pursued by soldiers, Graham gave us instead six six-foot-tall heads, six spheres inside which a live operator was pushing a sort of wheelbarrow. This conspicuous waste, featuring 120 people running around the stage, must have made a single scene cost the price of an entire, more modest and better, opera.

But to get the full measure of Mr. Graham's intellect, consider his note in the program, wherein he states that Bégearss "represents what Wilde called 'the worst excesses of the French Revolution.'" Now, that flat little tag makes sense only if you quote Lady Bracknell's entire, funny sentence: "To be born, or at any rate bred, in a handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French revolution." To quote merely the seven last words of Lady Bracknell is like proudly saying "Bégearss represents what Shakespeare called 'O what a rogue.'"

Even unenhanced, though, what Hoffman contrived is bad enough. There are interpolations of Turkish dialogue that are totally otiose, while Corigliano comes up with an Egyptian belly dancer, Samira, who sings both a cavatina and a cabaletta (we don't do things by halves!) to words that are the lowest of low camp and begin:

> I am in a valley and you are in a valley.
> I have no she- or he-camel in it.
> In every house there is a cesspool.
> That's life.

The fact that Marilyn Horne, who does Samira, looks rather like a she-hippopotamus makes the scene even campier, especially when you consider her suggestive gestures with her veils, and her singing a couple of bars while pinching and releasing her nostrils to achieve, as a *New York Times* article quotes her, "the high, warbling sound . . . crowds of Arabic women" make. Throughout this, as also elsewhere, there is a sizable, fully-costumed onstage orchestra,

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complete with conductor, playing little, but greatly adding to the confusion.

Meanwhile our transvestite Figaro does obscene things with a banana and more and more (somewhat suspect) Turkish enters the text, with the cabaletta sung entirely in that language. There are double-entendres as when Figaro *en travesti* offers the Count and the British ambassador fruit ("*figi, figi*"), and authorial self-congratulation as Marie Antoinette cheers, "Bravo, Beaumarchais! It's wonderful!" even as the ghosts do their rug-potato-egg noodling again. Then a bunch of peripatetic rheita players invades the scene, the rheita being a North African oboe, although Corigliano specifies that the rheitas be "disguised kazoos." At the climax of the scene, the Woman with Hat from the opening scene (atrociously sung by Jane Shaufuss) exclaims, "This is not opera! Wagner is opera!!" The director improves on this by bringing her on in full Valkyrie regalia: horned helmet, breastplate, spear. Chaos rules supreme as Act I ends.

Corigliano has, of course, written musical persiflage for the entire scene—this, after all, is the composer who stuck a tango by Albéniz into his AIDS symphony. Yet one is forced to wonder whether the opera and its production don't do as much disservice to camp as they do to opera. For camp, like pastiche, is funniest when it is small and sassy; make the takeoff as lavishly elephantine as what is being spoofed, and the joke turns sour. Deflation with a pin is amusing; with a steamroller, it isn't.

Act II begins with elaborate counterpointing of the ghosts' and the Beaumarchais characters' dialogue and music, and climaxes in a big laugh: "*Marie Antoinette*: I want to live again. Can you do that, Beaumarchais? *Beaumarchais*: Yes! We shall live in Philadelphia. . . . *Louis*: If you can call that living. *Woman with Hat*: Every day I thank God that I'm dead." Buffa is all very well, but this is more like the old buffola. Then, as Figaro refuses to use the necklace for the Queen's salvation, Beaumarchais enters his own play to bring his recalcitrant gracioso back in line. This is to make "history as it should have been" and enable Beaumarchais to make Marie Antoinette.

The idea of having the author get involved with the creatures of his imagination is not new. It is all over Pirandello and crops up even in Lewis Carroll when Alice dresses down her tormentors as just a pack of cards. It is the central device in a musical such as *City of Angels*, and something like it also governs Schnitzler's one-acter *The Green Cockatoo*, which, moreover, also uses the French revolution as backdrop. But there are two whopping absurdities in the handling of the conceit here. First, the notion that rewriting your artifact can rewrite history (the *Back to the Future* syndrome), and second, that Beaumarchais, by entering his play, somehow sacrifices his eternal salvation for love. Why shouldn't he exit the play as he entered it?

Yet everything hinges on this specious sacrifice: it is what makes Marie Antoinette fall in love with Beaumarchais. This is the weakest aspect of a weak libretto and music: neither verbally nor musically are we made to believe in and care for this love story. But if we don't believe and care, how are we to buy what Hoffman calls the "philosophical basis of the opera," that it is "a spiritual reconciliation between the legitimate desire to improve things, which represents the revolution [i.e., is represented by the revolution], and the spirit of the ancien régime. So my marriage between the two is after death, in the afterworld, between the two leading proponents of both [i.e., the leading proponents of each]." What disingenuous nonsense! If this were "the motivation for the whole thing," as Hoffman also says, the piece would not be flagrant camp, and the two main characters would be more complex and more real. *This* Marie Antoinette, who reminds me of nothing so much as the Beggarwoman in *Sweeney Todd*, is not a leading proponent of anything: she moons, moans, sulks, and gripes, and has not one idea in her glued-on head. And Beaumarchais is merely the constant lover from start

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to finish, which is very nice but of little symbolic or philosophical value.

And once inside his play, poor Beaumarchais loses any resemblance to a real character. When it suits the authors, he becomes a magician able to conjure up the trial of Marie Antoinette with himself as the judge and a whole crowd of jeering extras, but when he should really stop Bégearss and his minions, he is completely without power. Where, I repeat, is the consistency even fantasy cannot dispense with? Tennis, for example, is an arbitrary construct; but it remains tennis; it does not change in midgame into ice hockey.

Andrew Porter, writing recently in *The New Yorker*, has gone farther than anyone into listing the sources of the music. The Act I quintet "begins with the first strains of 'Voi che sapete.'" Susanna and Rosina's memory duet in Act II "is spun over an accompaniment of the *Così fan tutte* 'Soave sia il vento.'" Almaviva's palace band plays "a minuet drawn from 'Se vuol ballare.'" In the scene in which Beaumarchais frightens the rebellious Figaro, he "confronts him with the Statue music from *Don Giovanni*." We have already noted Figaro's entrance aria as an "homage to Rossini's 'Largo al factotum.'" The first-act finale contains some "exchanges of the *Barbiere* quintet." "Bégearss's second dull aria"—in which he stirs up the *tricoteuses* of Paris to storm Almaviva's farewell party by likening the aristocrats to rats (aristocRATS?) to the accompaniment of musical scurrying and squealing—"has origins in Corigliano's own flute concerto 'Pied Piper Fantasy,'" and "the tangy, microtonal . . . sound of the oboes in the first finale . . . was also used in his Oboe Concerto."

But, for the most part, Act II is musically becalmed. At such times the director overcompensates, as when he proffers four concentric prosceniums: the Met's own and, behind it, receding into the distance and getting smaller and smaller, three others—a set of Chinese stage boxes. At the Almavivas' farewell ball, three huge skulls in Napoleonic hats look down on the scene. And here we get the first of several set pieces in which we are supposed to be moved by the music becoming slow, very slow; the model, barely approached, seems to be the final trio from *Rosenkavalier*. Here are four lines from Hoffman's (not Hofmannsthal's) quartet:

Léon: Remember the fragrance
of mushrooms in the air?
Rosina: I remember a shimmering light.
Almaviva: I remember a star-filled night.
Florestine: I remember there were
raindrops in your hair.

You can't get much closer than that to the great lyrics of the past.

The prison scene where the Almavivas have one night in which to decide whether to face the guillotine or yield up Florestine to Bégearss (and then, most likely, go to the guillotine anyway) has some of the opera's best music, but again desperately capitalizes on being slow, very slow, as if languor guaranteed deep emotion. Still, the alternation between tremolando strings, mostly in a low register, with solo woodwinds is pretty enough, which leads us, slower than slow, into the opera's pièce de résistance, the Quintet and Miserere. While Figaro and Beaumarchais are away trying to get help, the Almavivas and Susanna sing: "Storm and fire overwhelm me, / Fear and death are at my door, / But the thought of those dear faces / Brings me rest in this time of war." *War* is hardly the *mot juste*, but it does provide a rhyme. But why the *thought* of those dear faces when they're all right there? *Sight*, surely?

At this point, in an upper-tier cell of the Conciergerie, we see the shadow of the Queen, and hear her sing a Miserere that eventually blends adroitly with the Almavivas' Quintet. Slowness here wreaks its masterpiece. Beaumarchais and Figaro arrive, having intrigued their way into the Almavivas' cell, but the key to Marie Antoinette's, alas, resides with the crass Wilhelm, Bégearss's man. The women—Ro-

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sina, Susanna, and Florestine—manage to vamp it away from him in a kind of modified gang-bang scene, while Almaviva watches in indignant incomprehension—a fellow too thick even for a thin operatic character. And we hear stuff like: "*Beaumarchais*: Your wife is bold but never mannish. *Figaro*: Her dad was Welsh, her mother Spanish." Again: "*Beaumarchais*: A woman free is man's delight. *Figaro*: What's a bitch without a bite?" This could successfully compete in any non-sequitur championship.

Beaumarchais can now release the Queen, but Bégearss pops in with the soldiery. Figaro denounces him as a counterrevolutionary who wants to keep the necklace for himself; it is found on him, and he is carted off to his end. As the others escape, Beaumarchais offers the Queen her freedom. She refuses to change history, somehow feeling that only in death can she remain with her beloved playwright. This makes very little sense, but after three hours, who cares? Her final aria, rewritten to the specifications of Miss Stratas, is very different from what is printed in the libretto, but, again, who cares? The music, yet again slow, very slow, turns totally pseudo-Mozartian for the finale. We see in the distance the blade falling on Marie Antoinette's head, while overhead a small Mongolfier brothers' hot-air balloon carries the miniaturized version of the *Mère coupable* characters off to the safety of England.

Meanwhile poet and queen ascend into the air. As Andrew Porter puts it, "in the gardens of Aguas Frescas (according to the score) or in Paradise (according to the Met synopsis) the ghosts of Marie Antoinette and Beaumarchais find peace," and the opera that began with a serial tone row ends while, to quote Patrick J. Smith, "the orchestra cadences on a serene A-major pianissimo." The applause on opening and subsequent nights was fortissimo, however. But what, really, was being applauded? No doubt a generally fine cast in which, among twenty-three soloists, only Judith Christin (Susanna) and the aforementioned Jane Shaufuss were bad. Miss Stratas, aside from lacking class as always, is beginning to lose her lower register, while her upper one has a disturbing steely edge, but oh, how she tries, both vocally and histrionically! The rest of the cast, though, shines, with Gino Quilico (Figaro), Renée Fleming (Rosina), Håkan Hagegård (Beaumarchais), Tracy Dahl (Florestine), and Graham Clark (Bégearss) especially impressive. Marilyn Horne, although ludicrous as Samira, still has enough of her once-mighty voice for the undemanding tessitura of her part.

Applauded, too—perhaps above all—were John Conklin's ostentatious sets and costumes. The scenery was not exactly uncluttered, but, opulent and versatile, it achieved kaleidoscopic effects. One could see where those millions of dollars went—or, rather, sashayed, capered, tripped, and thronged. Surely, what was being applauded was trappings and tumult. One could see the Met audience, usually ready to join the chorus of ghosts here as they sing, "another evening at the opera. . . . I'm so bored, bored, bored," stirred up by the whirling spectacle to the point where I wondered whether the *mise-en-scène* without a single note of music might not have been applauded and cheered just as vigorously.

The abiding question is: Do camp and pastiche mix with alleged high seriousness? The main model here, as Hoffman has admitted, was the Strauss-Hofmannsthal *Ariadne auf Naxos*. But the difference—aside from the very great one in quality—is that in *Ariadne* the drama and the vaudeville, though juxtaposed, never really blend, which is precisely the point: in the end, the high and the low do not mix, however effectively they offset each other. In *Ghosts*, everything gets slapped together: buffa and seria are the same thing in or out of drag: Figaro becomes a dancing girl, Bégearss turns into a puppeteer, Corigliano masquerades as Mozart or Strauss. An ascent to heaven and an escape in a hot-air balloon are the same hot air, but at least the Met can laugh all the way to the bank and justify itself with Samira's "In every house there is a cesspool."

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Abstraction then and now, or, thoughts on drawing from the Morgan Beatus

by Deborah Rosenthal

This is a tale of two apocalypses. Waiting for the millennium, having already passed the first deadline for the end of days somewhere around A.D. 800, awaiting his own death and final judgment, a monk in Spain paints in a scriptorium; he is illustrating passages from Revelations that were quoted, some centuries before, in a commentary on that book by Beatus of Liebana. We painters here now, having already passed the proclamation of the death of painting, "postmodern," await our own fates—while we paint.

This Beatus manuscript lies almost exactly as distant in time from the twentieth century as the art of the antique was from the Florentines of the 1420s. Just as the world of classical antiquity was opened to the artists of the Renaissance, this other Lost World, of which the Morgan Beatus is part, may be reopened to artists now.

Like the antique sculptures that were unearthed during the Renaissance after centuries under rubble, sometimes right in front of the artists who then used them as their models, the artifacts of this other Lost World have always been around us, though in various ways secreted from our view—in recent centuries largely by the prevailing taste for the Renaissance and Baroque, which kept the smaller objects of pre-Renaissance Europe's sacred art less well known. Like many of these objects a luxury made only for the eyes of the few, this Spanish Beatus manuscript has been a prize of the Morgan Library's collection since 1919. Although individual leaves have been exhibited from time to time, it is, being a bound book, impossible to show in its entirety. (In one now-famous episode, Meyer Schapiro brought Fernand Léger to the Morgan Library to leaf through the manuscript—probably the most important encounter with the manuscript that has been had so far.) Just now, this manuscript has been printed in facsimile—for the first time in its existence, anyone can look at the totality of the manuscript's illustrations.[1] Anyone can, and artists, especially, should.

Luckily, this manuscript is, owing to its graphic clarity, eminently reproducible as a book; the facsimile contains wonderfully faithful reproductions of the pages I have seen several times at the Morgan Library. I have been drawing from some of these pages in reproduction over the years; a few are in John Williams's book *Early Spanish Manuscript Illumination*. Now it is possible to draw from any of them, almost as if one were drawing from the original (the facsimile is reproduced almost the same size as the manuscript, too).

When I think of the Morgan Beatus, I find that I am thinking of Mondrian, Klee, Kan-

1 *A Spanish Apocalypse: The Morgan Beatus Manuscript*, with an introduction and commentaries by John Williams and a codicological analysis by Barbara A. Shailor; George Braziller/The Pierpont Morgan Library, 239 pages, $175.

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dinsky, Arp, the Delaunays, and Léger. First comes Klee: this manuscript is a set of illustrations of *that which has been revealed*, or, as Klee's said, *rendered visible*. That includes, here, *words* as well as *images*; some of the images are bounded by rectangles, even bordered by elaborate frames, but others wander in and out of the region of the text, some pieces of which in turn drift through the pictorial spaces. The letters, of course, are shaped, and colored, and sometimes capped or filled in, with forms borrowed from the pictorial side. These are not symbols, these words, but thoughts made visible. I think with regret how much was surrendered when the words imprinted on the air passing between the angel and Mary evaporated out of Western painting . . . and then I remember instances of that Lost World reborn in the work of those modern artists: the large green "R" of Klee's *The Villa R*; the complementary colors of Sonia Delaunay's collage letters spelling out "Dubonnet"; the occasional letters, words, and numbers, drawn in a stick-figure manner so much like his figures, of Torres-García's compartmentalized paintings . . .

Abstraction, then and now, evinces toward nature an analytical attitude that displaces perception as the motive for representation. There is a natural hierarchy of forms in the physical world—the artist who chooses to *describe* an object is at literal and metaphorical distance from it; it is separate from him or her, and can likewise be distinguished from other objects and phenomena—fur from glass, the proportion of a child's head to body from an adult's, the figure from the flux of the background, the flat printed letter-symbols that make up the word "head" from the head of a person. Klee's mutable line, Mondrian's flat frontal rectangles of primary color, Kandinsky's translucent interpenetrating planes that loom and recede—all these minimize, even abolish, or, on the other hand, equally emphasize the perceived boundaries between forms, between objects. By drawing attention to these contours, these artists imply that their own boundaries—the distances, psychic as well as formal, between them and their forms, be they figures, letters, paisley shapes, or cylinders—also have been brought into question. We are not meant to be able to measure, securely, the distance between the felt presence of the artist-observer and what he or she has observed. Only the presentation of forms in relation to one another allows us to understand their value. In fact, the "natural" hierarchy that mimesis is designed to describe is destroyed in abstraction precisely to make possible a reordering, one that presents us with a world that may look very different from the ordinary everyday one. I believe it was Augustine who—equating beauty with *symmetria*—said that Phoenician pots, infamously ugly, become beautiful when arranged symmetrically. The Byzantine artists, depicting Jesus miraculously raising Lazarus from the dead, turn all the faces—Jesus', Lazarus', and the spectators'—toward us, the viewers.

Explicit. This word occurs often in the text of the Beatus, which is, after all, a collection of *commentaries* on texts from Revelations. How to make their meanings clear? Maius, the monk-illuminator, illustrates one passage of Revelations at a time, each episode taking up part of a leaf, a whole leaf, or occasionally a double-leaf spread. John the visionary has already supplied the metaphors, slews of them, piled one over another over another in the text: "The sun became black as sackcloth of hair; and the whole moon became as blood. And the stars of heaven fell upon the earth, as the fig tree sheds its unripe figs when it is shaken by a great wind"; "And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed in the sun, and the moon was under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars"; "Behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horses, and upon his head seven diadems . . ." The text is all images, and the pictures, following the text closely, seem as complete and detailed a rendition of the text as could be: I think there are no elisions, no additions, no reversals of the juxtapositions explicit in the

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words. Maius never flinches or wavers from his sole task of reification of the text. There is a matter-of-factness to his means, a modesty (which is more common to "visionary art" of all periods than is thought—look at the drawings of Blake, or Redon). The world Maius creates here is uniformly painted, nowhere more than one layer of pigment deep. (Nor is there any gold leaf used in this manuscript.) Since Maius never calls attention to the painted surface itself, either by fluctuations of his touch or by only partially covering a form with color, each area of the surface is the equivalent of every other one.

The painted surface of the Beatus manuscript suggests the uniformly inflected surface which Clement Greenberg put at the very heart of abstraction. We may wonder, then, at the distance between the richness of the world of the Beatus and the near nullity of the world of Abstract Expressionist and Color Field paintings. Is it true, as Greenberg said, that abstraction tends to "monotony"? The great European inventors of modern abstraction made such full works —their drawing, their color, their spatial realizations are so varied, are such full utterances—that to develop abstraction from one of their premises alone would be an impoverishment. Yet the American abstract painters who came up in the 1940s, at the end of this seminal European generation, for the most part responded to those masters by emptying out a great deal of what they had put into their paintings, and by focusing largely on Greenberg's one issue, the issue of the paint itself.

But this question was already part of the complex meanings of European abstraction, and its various directions. It is made clear, by the work of Klee, or Kandinsky, or Mondrian, or the Delaunays, that oil paint is not the natural medium of abstraction. Developed in the service of mimesis, oil paint is, as often noted, perfectly suited to the demands of rendering the different surfaces of objects as well as weaving a unified atmosphere of light to bind them together. Although the European abstractionists were not the first modernists to use oil paint against itself (think of Seurat), it is notable that every one of them did—or, in the case of Klee, invented a thousand other mediums to approximate other surfaces instead. To construct a flat surface where every form could seem significantly related to every other one—where every form could, by analogy, be turned into every other one—the European abstractionists applied their oil paint in various ways. For example, they hid the individual brushstrokes while still making felt the fat, sensuous surface associated with painterliness (Mondrian); or they diluted their paint to a wash out of which forms swelled and contracted like a kind of low-grade pulsating matter (Miró). Beginning with Hans Hofmann, though, the surface ceased to be part of an analytic mode. Because Hofmann's Cubism was a perceptual study, he and the American abstractionists who followed him were left, perception abandoned, with not much more than surface effects. Paint quality was not, for them, one of the layers of a complex metaphor but instead, almost exclusively, the subject of the paintings. In some bright or monochrome paintings of the New York School (certain Hofmanns, Rothkos, and Stills come to mind), *color itself* has been virtually eliminated, and, as Greenberg says, the *texture* of paint alone is what is left to engage us. That was truly a *reductio ad absurdum*...

Frontal. In the Beatus manuscript, every shape is colored in right to its contours —Maius is like Mondrian in that he constructs his flat world of little more than planes of different colors. Maius's palette, of a gay and bright pastel intensity, consists of a handful of essential colors deployed to make every shape; from page to page, out of the same orange, blue, red, green, and elusive reddish mauve, Maius shapes here birds, there buildings, here human figures, there monsters. The very same colors form the famous horizontal bands that stretch through the entire field of most of the pages. On some pages curved, or less rectangular than blocklike, these zones of color set off the actors of each page's little drama. If one

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tries to draw the simply shaped figures —human and animal—it becomes apparent that the similarity of surface signifies that all things depicted are made of the same substance, that one must understand them to be equally palpable (or impalpable); one must translate them, in short, into similar or equivalent graphic elements.

Space and surface are identical here; the surface, as thin as a layer of pigment, is as uniformly opaque as a wall. But within that uniformity is a set of tensions, torsions, complications, juxtapositions, as rich as the world of Revelations. When a figure contorts itself, or a monster flicks its tail at an angle to the picture plane, in fact each time an opaque shape of color is put over another color, the space that seems everywhere to rise uniformly toward us is allowed to become a location that comes *further* forward. These forms of Maius's that cast no shadows behind or under them inhabit a universe of *in front* and even *in front-er* locations.

Because of its opacity, this world of the Beatus seems to be made of nothing but objects; objects themselves, in turn, are identified with *locations*. Writing of pre-Newtonian concepts of space in the Western world, Albert Einstein observed that "space (or place) is a sort of order of material objects and nothing else. If the concept of space is formed and limited in this fashion, then to speak of empty space has no meaning." The flatness and frontality embodying the complex subjects of the Morgan Beatus seem to me a perfect reflection of this cosmology; so are, among many other things, Byzantine mosaic figures, Catalan Romanesque altar frontals, early medieval ivories, Romanesque tympanum sculpture, and Gothic stained glass. Parallels (which we may also learn to use) may be found farther afield, in, for example, Egyptian art, certain Mesopotamian works, certain African art, and Islamic art. Artists recently have too often overlooked all these flowerings of what Einstein called "space as positional quality of the world of material objects."

Before abstraction was seen as an end to art, it was misunderstood as a rejection of nature. Klee, who modestly named *his* abstraction only "graphic art," taught that this art "renders visible" a world. The universe that is thus rendered visible is one that always exists beside—or inside—the ordinary material world, and often (though not always) contradicts it. Think of these examples: the convexity of the nose of Gabo's famous *Head* which becomes the ridges of two planes with a (concave) channel between them; the universally unbent verticals and horizontals of Mondrian's cityscapes which evince no parallax view, no perspectival swaying into diagonals or curves; the impossibly parallel full circles that in Klee's *Around the Fish* make up either end of a drinking glass seen thus at once from above and below, and in cross section. (One can find this same world rendered visible within the context of representational easel painting by such so-called visionary artists as Bosch, Goya, Blake, and Redon.)

Dialectic. As I draw from the Beatus pictures I find that every shape, be it monster or serpent, figure or group of figures, has its closed contour. Drawing around those contours yields almost nothing usable, just reduced forms that are clear but not illuminating and almost as conventional as heraldic forms. Since they are not meant, ultimately, to separate figure from ground, the contours of these objects or the grounds need not intrigue or seduce the eye—the drawing one gets from following them is dry, almost stock drawing. From reductions like those of Maius, we cannot derive reduction. Simply to trace, as it were to reproduce, the largest divisions here—the horizontals and the curved contours of the animals and people that intersect them—is to find only a number of simply repeated shapes. The text is full of details of enumerated identical forms, and the illuminations follow the text.

How, then, does the space in these pictures open up? In the corner of a typical page, for instance, seven angels are depicted holding trumpets. Lined up frontally so that the hems of their robes form a straight line

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(out of which fourteen identical little forms of feet emerge), these angels' faces are identical schemata, and the general posture of each body is the same as those of the other six. But draw from one to the next and you will discover that of the seven configurations of short, colored lines and little colored planes that form the draped surfaces of their bodies, *no two are identical.* Each piece of drapery is made up of a combination of colored lines and small planes of color (rather like Mondrian's "free line" and "neutral plane"); seven different times, the same outer contour of the angel is found to be in tension with a different set of colors, combined and configured differently. The simplified, rather unsatisfying shapes of Maius's creatures come to seem rather like Mondrian's stock of simplified (or, in his word, "neutral") forms: a method of reducing everything to comparable terms so as to permit the intimate comparison that is metaphor. In Maius's pictures, as in Mondrian's, the multiplication of such incidents of comparison is dizzying, seemingly infinite.

Drawing from pictures is a way of understanding them, explaining them; we are used to the idea that in finding the *essence* of a picture we will reduce as we draw, finding some "bare bones." Not so here: drawing from this reduced world, we are unraveling a metaphor that is irreducible; we must respond with expatiation and elaboration. Drawing from the Beatus, we may reinterpret its bands of color in our drawings as Constructivist planes, composed of many lines; the splendid complications of its draperies may yield in our drawings the comparative geometries of Platonic solids or even tessellating patterns in the plane. In such dialectics the abstractionist may find the resistance equal to the tension exerted on perceptual artists by stubborn reality.

The twentieth-century mind, even the artistic one, likes to explicate itself. The European abstractionists were so engaged in the process of understanding and explicating what they did that their invention bears all all of the following names: Constructivist, concrete, nonobjective, Synchronist, simultaneous, Neoplastic—among others. And this sometimes amicable act of naming was only part of the artists' compulsion to teach, through manifestoes, books, schools, and lectures, both one another and the general public, what their art meant. The catalogue of names, the relic of so much ardor and passion, should at this distance serve to remind us that abstraction resulted from responses to all the aspects of the art of the past, not just one. The great abstractions of Mondrian, Klee, Kandinsky, Arp, and others may include any or all of the following: distortion, reduction, or streamlining of forms; flatness; a palette reduced to the primaries; a palette reduced to whites; a palette reduced to black and white; a fully tonal palette; a palette of complementary colors; atmospheric effects; total opacity; geometrically reduced forms; organically based forms, including the human figure; forms based on machinery . . . this list is incomplete. Among their subjects: processes of nature rather than facts; a significant relationship of parts rather than the whole of the surface that covers them; the view of an object from a moving rather than a fixed vantage point. Like Masaccio regarding Giotto, or Delacroix regarding Rubens, we may look back across our own century to recognize our own essential vision in that of the seminal abstractionists of Paris, Moscow, Munich, and Dessau. Of course we know we are different women and men from them; but to be frightened off by the differences would be to become artists only of *this* moment —academic artists.

Though it is necessary, in relation to abstraction, to know that knowledge may lead to contradiction of experience, this notion is not, as some take it to be, a methodology of abstraction. We need to re-learn from the inventors of abstraction the way to make up pictures (in the course of doing so, we'll regain the subject matter Abstract Expressionism washed out). It is only because the ways of inventing abstractly have been so obscured that painters have recourse to drawing directly from life as a way of arriving

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at an abstraction. I do not mean to say that drawing from life is impossible or unnecessary; but the artist who goes to nature expecting everything but really looking for reduction is probably striking a devil's bargain. This method—holding to experience so that one's procedure may contradict it—is the opposite of discovery. Often, working this way, an artist drawing the curve of the model's flank or the set of land against the horizon can find only the same thing in both experiences. This way of coming to nature—with nothing in mind but making art—derives from the literalism about natural sensations of Abstract Expressionism. In the classrooms of its practioners, there is little possibility of learning to invent.

Yet it is true that very few artists are able to make up something out of their heads that can in any way rival nature. The example of Picasso, who usually worked from invention, looms large in the thoughts of many artists for whom artistry lies almost exclusively in making it up. In the funhouse mirror of Picasso's work painters discover elements of the parallel world of abstraction which seem essential: displacements, distortions, reductions, etc. Picasso's vision was at once so totally transformed and "other" *and* so overwhelmingly *not* abstract that he may prove to be a trap for the abstractionist. It may be more useful to think of those "abstract" aspects of Picasso's work as really owing more to his invention of Cubism, in the afterglow of which his lifelong impulse toward a figurative art unfolded.

Of greater interest to the abstractionist may be Matisse, the non-Cubist and inventor of great reductions whose final statements were the great abstract cutout decorations. (It is only in his last works that Matisse is useful to an abstractionist—his earlier reductions are so directly connected with a perceptual goal.) In his 1953 *Large Decoration with Masks*, the elemental mask-faces set in among the leaf and quatrefoil forms are a challenge to them, and are being challenged by them—that is, we are asked to compare the way the two are drawn. What Matisse employs in this work is the emblem of his own history of perceptual drawing, but also the history of the tri-lobed, quatre-lobed decorations in medieval stained glass and cathedral façades. Matisse invents a complex work by juxtaposing two distillations: one, the radically reduced drawing of the face, based on his own years of drawing heads from life; the other, the simplified leaves, derived from ornament, which is itself a collection of forms simplified by the hands of innumerable artist-artisans.

If the Matisse *Decoration* is a great, odd example of the way abstract invention may incorporate perceptually based elements, we should note that the organizing principle of this symphonic work is symmetry—which is non-perceptual. *It is necessary to discover that knowledge may contradict experience . . .* and of course this discovery began with Cézanne's overloading the picture with perceptual knowledge and resulted in paintings that contradict experience in many ways. And for the seminal abstractionists, too, because they were born in the nineteenth century, perception was the springboard: Mondrian, drawing the pier-and-ocean motif over and over again, finally imposes on it a symmetrical arrangement; Klee, on the epochal trip of his youth to Tunisia, was actually in the process of painting outdoors when he introduced into those watercolors the grid that lies beyond or outside the possibilities presented by the cityscape. These were leaps, not steps, rather like the leap Giotto made when he dared to turn the back of the figure on the viewer. And like Masaccio, who leapt from the place where Giotto had landed, artists learning from Klee or Mondrian need not trouble themselves to re-trace the steps immediately preceding the leap, but instead must find the deeper past of abstraction spiraling back from these artists' works. They themselves showed us this past—so much of the focus of their lecturing, and writing, and teaching was on showing us the abstract works of art which became their models. In Kandinsky's *Blue Rider Almanac* we find Egyptian shadow puppets whose lacy, irregular forms populate his late abstractions with a grave com-

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edy. Mondrian mentions Byzantine art favorably in his credo, "Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art," published in *Circle*, the Constructivist manifesto. Kandinsky reproduces the famous Ravenna mosaic of the Empress and her retinue in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Klee, of them all the most intellectual, addressed himself in all his brilliant teaching to the principles of nature study carried on in the absence of a desire to imitate the *appearance* of nature. This artist, who drew on more artists from the Western and other traditions than one can name, did not show those artists' works to his students.[2] Rather Klee, the savant of abstraction, showed them the sorts of things that a twentieth-century mind may know (and that sometimes contradict experience): atomic structure; X-rays; microscope views; telescope views; aerial views . . .

Coordinates. Most modern of all the things we know about space is the fourth dimension. For an artist, though, the fourth dimension can mean only a sort of pressure exerted on the two-dimensional representation of the three-dimensional world. "The victory over the concept of absolute space," wrote Albert Einstein, "became possible only because the concept of the material object was gradually replaced as the fundamental concept of physics by that of the field . . . The whole of physical reality could perhaps be represented as a field whose components depend on four space-time parameters . . . That which constitutes the spatial character of reality is then simply the four-dimensionality of the field." If we wish to be visionaries—if we wish to invent abstractly —we may have our feet still planted in the pre-Newtonian world of space-location and our heads in the air of the field theory following on Faraday and Maxwell. Maius wanted to invent the world seen after the Last Judgment, the world of heaven; we want to invent the world after the abolition of the concept of the material object, the world of the fourth dimension. But for us, as for Maius, it is the two- and three-dimensional coordinates of the field that most preoccupy us . . . because, after all, what we do when we paint is to make a material object. Experience in the world is the womb whose pressure is felt in the birth of invention.

We go to the museum and find that it is full of art that has met such pressure with abstraction; figures that look back at us in enamel on Limoges caskets, or in ivory carvings; elaborate geometric fantasies in the colored shapes of stained glass, or in the cold clear stone of Gothic tracery; foliage and borders and figures in the painted surfaces of Catalan frescoes and altar frontals; rhythmic draperies in the stone pictures of the Romanesque tympana. It is pointless to separate these worlds from the spiritual mind that made them: in its *explicit*ness the religious vision is as surprising and unconventional a world as any we moderns could imagine. Metaphor unsexes Adams and Eves, who stand surprised in nude-shaped clothing; metaphor reduces the Mother to childish proportions, and thus, theologically, to the child of her Child.

May no fate willfully [or otherwise] *misunderstand me / And half grant what I wish* . . . This is not the time to go learn scribal arts, or gold-leafing, or Catholic theology in preparation for making such pictures as one might from our roots in this old abstraction. Let us use the monk-artist Maius as a glorious metaphor: let us, too, celebrate that we are *here, now*. There has been, after all, no apocalypse: let us go on inventing modern pictures.

2 Klee's titles sometimes direct us to his sources. Occasionally too an art historian analyzes a work by Klee in relation to its sources. A fascinating example is Phyllis Williams Lehmann's "A Roman Source for Klee's 'Athlete's Head,'" which appeared in the December 1990 *Art Bulletin*.

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They hissed the tenor!

by J. Weintraub

An Italian Companion and Interpreter for the English Student and Tourist containing Words and Phrases of every day use compiled upon a new system together with the most essential grammatical elements of the language. By Emma Bertini.
Seventh Edition (Firenze, 1908)

When I encountered this relic among the Italian dictionaries in the deep stacks of the University of Chicago library, my first thought was that this very same edition may have been nestled alongside Lucy Honeychurch's Baedeker as she explored the shops and marble churches of turn-of-the-century Florence. Or perhaps it protruded from George Emerson's back pocket as he independently roamed through its *piazze* and *vicoli*.

But no. Although *A Room with a View* was published in 1908, the novel was conceived during E. M. Forster's first visit to Tuscany in the autumn of 1901. Still, time moved more slowly in those days than it does now, and if any of Forster's tourists had endeavored to communicate with their Italian hosts in their own language, they were probably repeating words and phrases similar to those provided in *An Italian Companion*. From the First Edition, perhaps.

The 1908 edition is pocket-sized and only 143 pages long, the first forty of which are devoted to elementary grammar. The remaining hundred pages, as the author reveals in her preface, consist of "words and phrases adopted to supply the needs of the traveller," and as in guidebooks today, these are assembled into topical sequences for convenient reference by travelers on the go. Predictably enough, the first of these categories consists of "Frasi le più necessarie."

"Most necessary" signifies not only language useful to the tourist but also those essentials of human communication without which civil discourse in any language could hardly take place. Most of these words and phrases require no translation: *buongiorno*, *scusi*, *basta*, *grazie*, *arrivederci*, *quanto costa*, *troppo caro*. Occasionally, the *Companion* will betray its age here with such entries as *Il fuoco è spento* ("The fire is out") or *Tenga i cavalli* ("Hold the horses"). But, in general, outmoded practices rarely intrude when basic desires are being addressed, when compliments and salutations are being exchanged, when vital information is being requested, when departures and arrivals, times and dates, holidays and festivals, the days of the week and the seasons of the year are in question.

These "necessary phrases" have remained, for the most part, unchanged since Dante's time, yet in the *Companion* an insistent tone governs a seemingly disproportionate share of them, as the author's desire "to supply the needs of the traveller" is translated into a continuous series of demands. Although the polite form is usually used, almost every phrase begins with an imperative: *Vada* . . . ("Go . . ."), *Mi porti* . . . ("Bring me . . ."),

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Mi dia . . . ("Give me . . ."), *Faccia questo subito!* ("Do this right away!"), *Lo lascia stare!* ("Leave it be!"), *Ripulisca i miei stivali!* ("Clean my boots!")

The commanding voice continues into the next section, "La Ferrovia" ("The Railway"). Of course, tourists in Forster's day were often on the road for months, and, unaccustomed to washing linen by hand in hotel rooms, they were frequently accompanied by mountains of luggage. *Facchini* (porters) were, at that time, everywhere, and by using the *Companion* the traveler could commission them to *portate* (carry), *caricate* (load), *scaricate* (unload), *pesate* (weigh), and *spedite* (book through) an assortment of *bagagli*, *paniere*, *cappelliere*, *scatole*, *bauli*, *sacche*, *astucci*, *fagotti*, and *valigie*. But other than having to convey a caravan of freight from place to place, the concerns of the railway passenger were pretty much the same as those of today's tourist. The language of bookings and timetables, tracks and connections, departures and destinations has changed little, although certain phrases—such as *Ho perduto un baule; farò un reclamo contro gl'impiegati!* ("I've lost a trunk; I'm going to make a claim against the staff!")—are more likely to be heard nowadays at Fiumicino airport than at Termini station.

Train travel, in an age of steam, did have its discomforts. *Bisogna che abbassi questo cristallo*, declares one phrase, *mi fa male il fumo* ("This window has to be lowered; the smoke is making me sick"). But by the turn of the century, the railroad was a mature technology. Its success at hauling large numbers of people quickly and cheaply over long distances and difficult terrain opened most of Europe to middle-class travel, creating, incidentally, a widening market for phrasebooks such as *An Italian Companion*.

Once the tourist's destination was reached, however, a more primitive mode of transportation was required to carry bodies and luggage to the hotel. Although the problems caused by the internal combustion engine are considerable, the phrases required to deal with "Carrozze e Vetture" ("Carriages and Cabs") reveal that transportation in the horse-and-buggy era had headaches of its own: *Il cavallo ha perduto un ferro!* ("The horse has lost a shoe!"), *Non schioccate la frusta!* ("Don't crack the whip!"), *Scansate i sassi!* ("Avoid the stones!"), *Non andate tanto vicino al fosso!* ("Don't drive so close to the ditch!"), *Badate di non farci ribaltare!* ("Careful not to turn us over!") Of course, these all have their modern equivalents, with the possible exception of *Non frustate il cavallo!* ("Don't beat the horse!"), and when it came to discussing the fee, it is clear that while machines have evolved, taxi drivers—or at least the Italian kind—have not: *È troppo* ("It's too much"), *Vi pago secondo la tariffa* ("I'll pay you according to the rate"), *Non vi dò altro* ("I won't give you any more"), *Che numero ha la vostra vettura?* ("What's the number of your cab?"), *Farò corso alla polizia!* ("I shall apply to the police!")

Once the traveler reached the hotel (or, more likely, the pension), he or she would, as we do, seek comfort, convenience, and service at a reasonable price, although *lenzuole umidi* (damp sheets) and insufficient hot water seemed to be a particular preoccupation then. But as with the horse and carriage, an older, soon-to-be-obsolete technology was still functioning, and the tenant or hotel guest was advised to be familiar with such terms as *calza* (wick), *soffietto* (bellows), *fuliggine* (soot), *parafuoco* (fire screen), and *cesta da carbone* (coal scuttle). The age was darker, chillier, and dirtier than ours, and it was prudent to know how to ask the porter or chambermaid to *accenda la stufa* (light the fire) and *porti via la cenere* (take out the ashes) or to be able to inform management that *il fuoco fa fumo* (the fire is smoking) and *il lume manda cattivo odore* (the lamp stinks). The final entry in the *Companion*'s "Fire and Light" section, however, points to brighter days ahead: *Accenda la luce elettrica!*

"Accenda" is, again, a command. Switching on a light in those early years of unregulated electrical installations may have been considered a risky business, best left to one's in-

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feriors. But demands to have services performed and requests for doing this or for not doing that continue to proliferate among the recommended phrases for dealing with "Meals and Food," "The Time," and even "The Weather": *Non lasci aperta quella porta; c'è il riscontro!* ("Don't leave that door open; there's a draft!") Of course, Italy in the early 1900s was a poor nation, and the tourist was likely to be far wealthier than most of the inhabitants. The majority of the workforce was employed at low-wage, labor-intensive jobs, and there were always plenty of *facchini*, *cocchieri* (coachmen), and *cameriere* (chambermaids) willing—for a small, negotiable sum—to *porta su la mia roba* (carry up my things), *mi faccia scaldare il mio letto* (have my bed warmed), *mandi a chiamare il dottore inglese* (send for the English doctor), *metta la tavola le bottiglie e vada* (put the bottles down on the table and go), *leghi questo* (tie this), and *sciolga quella* (untie that).

In fact, an entire section of the *Companion* is devoted to "La Servitù," revealing that although travel was becoming democratized, it was still largely the pursuit of those who were accustomed to having most of their needs taken care of by others. Yet the language provided in "La Servitù" suggests that, at least for the English, retaining reliable personal help in Italy may have required considerable effort. Along with the predictable exchanges for obtaining references, discussing salaries, and having simple tasks performed—such as *mi lavi i capelli* (wash my hair) and *batta e spazzoli bene i miei abiti* (beat and brush my clothes well)—the inclusion of such phrases as the following would surely have alerted the prospective employer to the likelihood of encountering among Italians a certain disinclination to conform to acceptable standards of professional subservience:

Non mi faccia aspettare tanto! ("Don't keep me waiting so long!")

Non stia tanto al mercato! ("Don't stay so long at the market!")

Non è mai pronto a rispondere al campanello! ("You never answer the bell promptly!")

Badi ai fatti suoi! ("Mind your own business!")

Non voglio ciarle! ("I don't want chattering!")

Zitto! ("Quiet!")

Perchè ha fatto così? ("Why did you do so?")

È un'impertinente! ("You're impertinent!")

Sono in collera! ("I am provoked!")

L'avverto che non soffrirò questo! ("I warn you, I won't stand for that!")

La manderò via se farà questo un'altra volta! ("I'll send you away if you do that one more time!")

Faccia il baule e se ne vada! ("Pack your bags and be off!")

And there are still more. It seems likely that after reviewing this litany of discontent, any traveler requiring the personal service of a valet or maid would immediately purchase an accompanying ticket for Jeeves or Sarah (and a phrase is given—*Vorrei che il mio servitore stesse vicino a me*—for requesting nearby accommodations for a servant). Or perhaps the tourist would be encouraged to subsidize the company of a poor relation, as did *A Room with a View*'s Mrs. Honeychurch who provided in Charlotte Bartlett not only a companion and chaperone for her daughter but also ensured that Lucy's hair would be properly combed and her things kept in order.

There was, however, one servant the traveler of the time might have been well advised to engage in Italy. *Può raccomandare una buona cuoca?* may be the most valuable phrase in the entire section, for hiring an Italian cook might have exposed the English

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tourist to an experience highly regarded today but apparently scorned or overlooked by his or her compatriots.

The word "restaurant" (*trattoria*) appears only once in the *Companion* (in the category "Of the Town and Streets," not in "Of Meals and Food"), and it is clear that the users of the guide were not expected to visit any. Instead, most would be taking their meals in their rooms or at the hotel's or pension's table d'hôte (*la tavola rotonda*) where the food was probably (as it was in Forster's Pension Bertolini) mediocre at best. The *Companion* would have provided them with the Italian for numerous edible creatures inhabiting the earth, air, and seas, including chamois (*camosci*), turtle doves (*tortore*), and tench (*tinca*). But it would have been little help in acquainting the English with regional preparations or dishes, being far more useful for recapturing the flavor of their own homeland than for discovering the cuisine of the country they were visiting. From its pages, the hungry traveler could order hash (*stufato* [*sic!*]), pickled herring (*aringhe marinate*), mutton (*montone*), marmalade (*marmellata*), and small beer (*birra leggiera*). But *polenta*, *pizza*, and *pesto* are absent. Of the Italian cheeses, only *parmeggiano* appears in the vocabulary; of the hundreds of pastas, only *maccheroni* and *vermicelli*.

There is nothing on regional wines (only *vino rosso* or *bianco*), although the Italian is given for sherry (*vino di Xeres*), claret (*Bordeaux*), brandy (*aqua vite*), cognac (*cognac*), and French wine (*vino Francese*). There's cider (*sidro*), seltzer (*aqua di Seltz*), and tea (*nero*, *verde*, *misto*, *forte*, and *leggiero*; i.e., black, green, mixed, strong, and weak). Coffee and milk are also present, but *cappuccino* is nowhere to be found. With the use of the *Companion*, it would have been an easy thing to ask for (although perhaps not to get) a dinner of roast beef with mashed potatoes, horseradish sauce, and pickles on the side (*rosbiffe con purée di patate, sugo di ramolaccio, e sottoaceti*) followed by pudding and punch (*budino e ponce*). But a menu of *tortellini*, *osso buco*, and *zabaglione* would presumably have left the owner of this guide mystified.

Following the extensive vocabulary, there are several pages of useful phrases, most of them having to do with ordering food or drink. But other than questions inquiring whether the fruit is ripe, the milk is boiled, the bread is buttered, and the eggs are fresh, there is only one specific food singled out for special treatment: *Non mi piace l'aglio* ("I don't like garlic").

(Thirty years later Giovanna Tassinari, the author of *Brush Up Your Italian*, Second Edition [Philadelphia, 1937], was urging her English and American readers to overcome their traditional customs and prejudices and experiment with real Italian cuisine: "Travellers often come back from a prolonged stay in Italy, having feasted their eyes, but having neglected to appease their unfortunate sense of taste. . . . The food in the hotels and pensions tends to have a certain sameness everywhere. It's in the smaller restaurants, the *Ristoranti popolari* . . . that one finds those dishes that are a local specialty, fruits of recipes handed down from father to son for hundreds of years.")

Manicotti appears in the "Woman's Wardrobe" section. (It's the plural for "muff.") There are over sixteen pages in the *Companion* devoted to clothes or dress, suggesting that although the English traveler may not have come to Italy to eat, he or she certainly did not disdain the Italian reputation for designing and fabricating fine attire. Catalogued into such sequences as "At a Draper's," "At a Glover's," "Ladies' Dress," and "The Tailor," the vocabulary would seem today, in its comprehensiveness, to be of practical use only to a fashion designer or wholesale haberdasher. Not only most textiles, but sometimes variations of each —*cotone da rammendi* (darning cotton), *mossolino ricamato* (worked muslin), *tulle blonde* (blonde net), *lana filata* (worsted wool)—are offered. Included are specialized garments, both exterior and interior: *veste da camera* (dressing gown), *abito da società* (shooting coat), *pedana* (foundation skirt),

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copribusto (corset cover); accoutrements such as *fibbie* and *fiocchi* (buckles and bows), *fermagli* and *fascette* (clasps and stays); and such garment components as flounces (*gale*), fringes (*frangie*), and frilling (*galina increspeta*). There is a variety of hats (felt, straw, tall), gloves (cotton, danish, kid, knitted), and a good many items no longer hanging in the modern closet: boas (*boa*), nightcaps (*barrette da notte*), and tippets (*baverine di palliccia*).

The reach of the vocabulary is matched by the specificity of the phrases. As well as the expected questions concerning materials available, cost, and delivery, the *Companion* would enable the customer to inform the tailor not only that the coat doesn't fit but more particularly *fa delle grinze sulle spalle* ("it sits in wrinkles between the shoulders"); he or she could ask to see not only a ready-made jacket but one with *le maniche foderate di seta* ("the sleeves lined with silk"); the shoemaker could be told not only that the new shoes pinched but that they needed to be *comodi sul collo dei piedi* ("comfortable at the insteps").

Implied in these sequences is a certain confidence in the artisan, far more than the English tourist was apparently willing to concede to servants or coachmen. In fact, one remark—*La faccia di moda* ("Make it according to fashion")—places full responsibility for the garment in the hands of the tailor. Yet despite the reputation and skill of the Italian craftsman, there still seems to be a reluctance to trust the good will and professionalism of a foreigner without at least a semblance of concern. *Sarà di parola?* ("You'll keep your word?") is followed by *Posso contarci?* ("Can I rely on it?") Less insulting, and perhaps even a little poignant, is the subsequent comment: *Non manchi* ("Do not fail me"). It was probably considered prudent to remind the shoemaker, *Se non mi stanno bene, le rimando* ("If they don't fit me well, I will return them").

The remaining sections of the *Companion* are short, although they cover a great deal of territory: "Post and Telegraph," "Stationers and Booksellers," "At a Watchmaker's," "Human Body and Health." There's a sample lease, a form to the postmaster to forward mail, salutations and closings for letters. There are equivalents for weights and measures and vocabulary lists for species of birds, decorative plants, and stations of life (from orphan to Emperor).

But as in the food and wardrobe sequences, hardly any of this terminology could be identified as being particularly Italian, and there is certainly little attention paid to the attractions that probably enticed the tourist to Italy in the first place. Other than inquiries about opening and closing times and applications for admission, there is nothing to indicate that there might be distinctive paintings in the museums, frescoes in the churches, sculpture in the gardens, architecture in the streets, or antiquities in the countryside. Presumably, knowledge of Italian was not necessary to appreciate these things, and Messrs. Baedeker, Ruskin, or Murray could be consulted for guidance or for instruction on the finer points.

An Italian Companion was written by an Italian and published in Italy, yet not much is revealed about the country, and little sympathy is shown for its people. The meridional air and spirit seem not to filter through its words and phrases. Of course, we should be wary of loading too much cultural weight onto a text with such a limited scope and such specific objectives. The tourist, then and now, has been largely confined to a predictable round of transport facilities, hotels, shops, museums, and landmarks, and outside of these circumstances—and a few other simple transactions usually involving an exchange of currency or bits of information—he or she is unlikely to enter the world of the inhabitants in any meaningful way.

Besides, it would be a formidable task to attempt to confront reality beyond these circumscribed realms, to deal with the infinite possibilities of daily discourse in a book compact enough to slip into the pocket of a person only superficially acquainted with the language. Several phrases in the *Companion*'s "Man and Circumstances of Life"

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category reveal the futility of such an effort. This section, one of the shortest in the book, contains vocabulary concerning age, family relations, and business affairs. But isolated phrases like *Quando avranno luogo le nozze?* ("When will the wedding take place?"), *Tira da suo padre* ("He takes after his father"), and *È morto da un pezzo?* ("Has he been dead for long?") seem arbitrary and, without any contextual dialogue, somewhat absurd.

There is, then, a certain inevitability in the choices of language that will appear in a phrasebook, and in its concentration on the limited and peculiar concerns of the traveler, it serves to insulate as much as communicate, constrain as well as reach out. In fact, it is more likely to connect the traveler with an international community of tourists than with any national community he or she is visiting. Almost the entire contents of *An Italian Companion* could have been directed toward a vacation in Norway or Greece, with the only alteration being the language into which the words and phrases were translated. Whatever cultural peculiarities or disorientations a modern English or American tourist might sense or experience from using this guide today would probably result more from the passage of time than from the passage over the Alps.

But despite the cross-cultural uniformity of the European traveler's agenda, the very existence of a phrasebook such as this implies a crossing of boundaries, a penetration by one national group into the land of another and the resulting confrontation of different sensibilities. But the language in *An Italian Companion*—its tone, its inclusions and omissions—seems rather intended to appeal to the prejudices and proclivities of the English reader than to overcome these barriers and enlighten the tourist about Italy and its people. The author seems to have understood her market, too, since the work did pass through at least seven editions, the first six, according to the preface, "having been quickly exhausted."

Discussing in a recent interview his soon-to-be-released film *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the director Charles Sturridge revealed that what interested him most in Forster's first novel was "how the English behave abroad, in particular how badly they behave." This "collision of the cool or even cold Northern temperament and the warm energy of Europe or, later, India" was, of course, one of the author's recurrent themes. In this same novel, published in 1905, the English protagonists attend a production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in a provincial theater. There, they are respectively appalled, astonished, and bemused by the raucous and familiar behavior of the Italian audience. It is conceivable that these characters, too, could have been equipped with an earlier edition of Emma Bertini's *Companion*. But with one exception, it would have done little to prepare them for the scene they were about to witness.

The section in the *Companion* devoted to "The Theatre" provides phrases for reserving seats and acquiring tickets in language no different in meaning from that heard in the foyers of the Paris Opéra and Covent Garden. One phrase, however, seems to be illuminated by the clash of two very disparate temperaments, representing the vast cultural distance the *Companion* only rarely sought to bridge. This isolated phrase, the only one available enabling the English visitor to express his or her experience in an Italian theater, was surely expected to be delivered with some degree of bewilderment and dismay: *Hanno fischiato il tenore!* ("They hissed the tenor!")

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Poems *by Leslie Norris, Alan Michael Parker & C. H. Sisson*

Spitfire

Flight Sergeant (Pilot) John Curtis Bevan, 1314667, serving with the Royal Air Force (Volunteer Reserve) 611 Squadron, died on 9 November 1943, age 21, and is buried in Plot 4, Row AA, Grave 17, in Longuenesse (St Omer) Souvenir Cemetery, France. . . .
—excerpt from a letter from the Commonwealth War Commission

The Spitfire One
is made by Vickers Armstrong
in cities the three boys have not seen,
Southampton, Winchester, Swindon.
Each month in the library
they search *Flight*'s newest pages
for images of its symmetry, perfect
beyond eagles, thirty feet long.

Wearing incongruous floats
it wins The Schneider Trophy,
sweeping in tightest bends
above a riptide
breaking against The Needles.
They speak its language,
having learned by heart this rune:

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one 1030-hp Rolls-Royce Merlin
V12 liquid-cooled engine:
maximum speed 355 mph, range
three hundred and ninety-five miles.
But in their minds
its flight is silent.
They imagine it through the air
with their gliding hands.
Their cycles race above the clouds.

They do not think of this:
armament, *four 7.7-mm. machine-guns,*
two 20-mm. cannons,
not even as they grow
into men's long bodies,
manage their cracking voices,
learn that innocence ends.

On a wide beach
at the edge of Europe,
the sun going down,
they throw a football
above their running shadows.
As they twist and catch
the sand is granular
between their toes.

It is the last evening of peace.

The beach is dark as plums
and heavy with water.

—*Leslie Norris*

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Two suns

Like a slap
the second sun
arrives, arranged
as though all errant
images were imprisoned
in its image.
Pane by pane
the Pan Am building
fills with flame,
south from 50th.
Why not!
The world is wholly
all its worlds,
alibi and alias,
and *black* contains,
bemusedly, its *blueberry*,
why can't a cantilevered
thought include
the fact of a mirage,
a mirrored moment
in the sun's
second sun?
It can. It does.
It fills two
buckets full, brimming
with each breath
—and winter, and *will*,
and a long walk
down Park, downtown,
doubled with light.

—*Alan Michael Parker*

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To a garden asleep

Sleep, garden, in your beauty now:
You may, nor fear a meddling hand
Will dare disturb a single leaf.
Be what you are, your time is brief:
Do not attempt to understand
Or wonder when or why or how

This moment will disintegrate.
It is, and while it is, you are.
The day is windless, and it seems
To hold the present fast: our dreams
Vanish into a distant star
Insensitive to human fate.

Extended leaves and petals fit
Exactly into the still air
And neither proffer nor refuse.
The quiet is complete. No clues
Suggest another time will dare
To force your beauty to submit.

—*C. H. Sisson*

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Sonnet

I well remember what it was to be
On the outside of what I was inside,
An office where the competences tried
Were not those which came naturally to me.
I had no notion of the fantasy
Entertained by the colleagues at my side:
I had my own—a solitary pride
Which drew me to the well of poetry.

Now old, I wander still and lack the light
Others can see by; nearly but not quite
Is still what others read as my device
Which either, blind, I cannot read at all,
Or, for a moment, dazzles and I fall
Outside the in or through the slippery ice.

—C. H. Sisson

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Music

Menuhin: the child, the genius, the man

by Samuel Lipman

And summer's lease hath all too short a date...
—Shakespeare, *Sonnet XVIII*

Yehudi Menuhin—and his small but potent family—have never lacked for publicity. The barrage of words began in the mid-1920s, when Menuhin (born in New York in 1916) burst upon the musical world, first in San Francisco, then in New York, and finally in Europe. From the first his playing was felt to possess an unearthly quality, and Albert Einstein, for one, thought that it was a proof of the existence of God. A younger sister, Hephzibah (1920-1981), was a brilliantly gifted child pianist; the youngest sister, Yaltah (born 1922), was also a considerable talent at the piano. The Menuhin parents, father Moshe (1893-1982) and mother Marutha (born *c.* 1891), both Russian-Jewish immigrants by way of Palestine, were notable personalities as well: Moshe in his later years became an outspoken, not to say vicious, anti-Zionist, and Marutha very obviously tried to run her children's lives with an iron hand—even after they were married and themselves parents.

The Menuhin publicity was not simply a matter of newspaper and magazine copy. A biography of Yehudi by Robert Magidoff appeared in 1955, and an autobiography, *Unfinished Journey*, came out in 1977. A collection of his occasional writings, *Theme and Variations*, was published in 1972; *Conversations with Menuhin* was done by Robin Daniels in 1979; *The Compleat Violinist*, Menuhin's thoughts on playing the violin, was brought out in 1986. Lionel Menuhin Rolfe, the son of Yaltah, published his often critical account of the clan, *The Menuhins: A Family Odyssey*, in 1978. Yehudi's second wife, Diana, wrote her autobiography, *Fiddler's Moll*, in 1984; in the same year, his father's self-justifying recollections, *The Menuhin Saga*, were published posthumously. And now it has been announced that the writer David Dubal is bringing out yet another set of conversations with the violinist, to appear in the near future.

Just this past summer, PBS presented a two-hour television program in the "American Masters" series, "Menuhin: A Family Portrait," done by the English filmmaker Tony Palmer; a book by Palmer with the same title, based on the program, was published in London at the end of the year.[1] Consisting in the main of interviews with Menuhin and the surviving members of his family and excerpts from recent performances of Menuhin playing and conducting, the program, like the book, was done with the cooperation of the violinist and of his wife but in the end appears not to have entirely pleased them; the opinion of the other family members on what was done with their interviews is not known, at least to me.

Whatever the reactions of the participants may be, the story of the film, and of the

1 *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, by Tony Palmer; Faber & Faber, 207 pages, $19.95.

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book, is quite easily told. As a child, Yehudi was the center not just of Menuhin family life but of the life of each member of the Menuhin family. He was a privileged being, the center of attention not only of his parents and his siblings but of rich and powerful patrons such as Sidney Ehrman in San Francisco and Henry Goldman in New York, and of great musicians such as Louis Persinger (his first real teacher), the violinist and composer Georges Enescu, and the brothers Busch, Adolf the violinist and Fritz the conductor. By the time they were both in their teens, Yehudi began to appear with his sister Hephzibah in recitals; Yaltah early began to assume the role of also-ran that she was increasingly to play as the years went on.

Cosseted as Yehudi was, he early evinced an interest in girls, and before he had been long in his twenties he had met and married a young Australian one, by whom he soon had two children. The marriage did not long outlast World War II, during which Yehudi, with conspicuous bravery, traveled all over the world to entertain American troops. At war's end, he was quick to play both in the former concentration camps and in occupied Germany. His attention was a prime factor in the rehabilitation of conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler from the accusation of cooperation with the Nazis. In 1947, he married Diana Gould, a ballerina and an actress who had studied with Marie Rambert and danced with Leonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska, and George Balanchine. They had two sons, one of whom, Jeremy (born 1951), later became a quite successful young pianist. From the late 1940s on, Menuhin settled in England and in Switzerland; indeed, before long his American origins had become quite effaced.

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Menuhin continued to play all over the world, often visiting the Soviet Union as well as his native America. Increasingly he conducted, too, mostly chamber orchestras but sometimes full orchestras as well. As a conductor he never seemed quite at home on the podium, either as musician or as disciplinarian; as a violinist, his playing, no matter how much it bore vestiges of his early glory, began to seem labored and erratic. But for many of his fans, it hardly seemed to matter: when Menuhin played, they heard not his playing but their memories, and in any case, his consciously assumed role as world-citizen and campaigner for international human rights quite compensated his audience for any violinistic shortcomings to which pure music lovers might captiously object. Now, rich in honors, including a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth, he is more than a musician; he is a statesman, admired by all save those who doubt that the attainment of peace is simply a matter of the desire to accommodate one's adversaries.

Upon just how much reality was all this fame originally based? Now, at sixty and more years remove, the only evidence we can have is that provided by recordings. Yehudi's recordings began in 1928, when he was not yet twelve.[2] By the end of that year he had recorded five double-sided twelve-inch 78 RPM discs and one ten-inch disc, all together perhaps forty minutes of playing. All the repertory (except for the slow movement of a Mozart concerto) was of what might be called encore pieces. But however slight the repertory, the tone of the violin—as, for example, in an allegro by the now forgotten Gioseffo Hectore Fiocco (1703-1741) and in the extraordinary *Baal Shem* of the unfairly neglected Ernest Bloch (1880-1959)—was that of a transcendent human voice, simple, heartfelt, and sweet without any hint of saccharin. So beautiful does the playing now seem that one hardly notices the effortless technique and the vital rhythm the young boy demonstrated in every piece. Indeed, these earliest of Menuhin recordings stand as a pure manifestation of what being a musical prodigy is all about: not just playing marvelously well as a child, but contributing a quality of musical expression individual and perfect in it-

2 My copy of these first Menuhin recordings is on a 1970s LP, Discopaedia MB 1013. They are now available on a Biddulph CD, LAB 031.

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self, regardless of any considerations of age.

Not only did Menuhin play incomparably more beautifully and profoundly than most so-called child prodigies, but unlike them he was not a flash in the pan. Because of the miracle of recording, we can follow his growing-up year-by-year. In 1929, he recorded the massive solo Sonata in C major of Bach; of all the high points in this recording by a thirteen-year-old boy, perhaps the most extraordinary is the soulful opening of the mighty fugue which serves as the work's second movement.[3] From 1930, there is a marvelous full-throated performance of the noble Corelli Sonata no. 12 in D minor, based on the Spanish folksong *La Folia*.[4] From 1931 comes the classic recording of the Bruch G-minor Concerto, in which Menuhin's playing, at once proud and sorrowful, of the beginning of the slow movement seems to open a window on heaven.[5] From 1932, there are two classic recordings. The first is of the Bach Double Concerto, with the great violinist (and Menuhin's then teacher) Georges Enescu, and the sensitive and sympathetic conductor Pierre Monteux.[6] The second classic 1932 recording is of the Elgar Concerto, with the composer conducting.[7] What distinguishes the Menuhin-Enescu Bach performance is its density, with every note fully and deeply played rather than sweetly skated-over, as is the fashion with today's mass-produced celebrity performers. Menuhin's Elgar Concerto is extraordinary for its melding of Menuhin's innate Jewish-Russian romanticism with Elgar's sturdy English richness of melody and texture. Menuhin's bounteous emotion, expressed in tone and rubato, is in perfect taste; his emotion flows, as always in his playing, but never overflows. From 1933, there is a recording, passionate and elegant, of the Chausson *Poème*.[8] From 1934, we get a probing, magisterial performance of the Schumann Violin Sonata in D minor, opus 121;[9] Menuhin's pianist and alter ego in the Schumann is his sister Hephzibah, just turned fourteen.

The verdict on the early Yehudi Menuhin provided by his recordings, then, is clear: by the age of eighteen he was, and for some years already had been, one of the great violinists of a period known for its great violinists, among whom must be counted Heifetz, Zimbalist, Elman, Szigeti, Enescu, Busch, Huberman, and Thibaud. At no point in the years of his growing-up was his playing seen as anything but that of a fully mature artist. At no point was he less than an equal of his older colleagues, and the evidence of his recordings suggests that he may well have been *primus inter pares*.

What connects the triumphant prodigy career of Menuhin with what so many have seen as adult years of decline? From the mid-1930s on, his playing seemed to lose something of its quality of unspoiled innocence. Menuhin had never been a great, in the sense of flashy, technician: very likely, no performer with so much to say could ever be a truly brilliant virtuoso. Now certain imperfections and clumsinesses in Menuhin's playing began to be heard, and charged against him; increasingly, the applicable standards in violin-playing were those of Heifetz, who guaranteed perfect results at every concert and in every recording. Then too,

3 In the last days of the LP this 1929 performance was available in an "HMV Treasury" set, containing Menuhin's prewar playing of all the Bach solo sonatas and partitas, as EMI EX 7 69377 1. When this set was issued two or so years ago on CD as EMI CHS 7 63035 2, a 1934 Menuhin performance of the sonata, vastly less natural, was substituted.

4 My copy of this performance is on another 1970s "HMV Treasury" LP, EMI HLM 7077. It is now available on a Biddulph CD, LAB 032.

5 My copy of this performance is in yet another EMI LP set from the 1970s, RLS 718. It is now available on a Biddulph CD, LAB 031.

6 My copy of the Bach is on the EMI LP set containing the Bruch.

7 My copy is on a 1972 "HMV Treasury" LP, EMI HMV 7107. It is also available on CD on Angel CDH 69786.

8 My copy is in the EMI set mentioned above, along with the Bach and Bruch concertos.

9 EMI (France) LP EX 2908703.

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Menuhin was now an adult, subject to the buffetings of personal life and the dislocations—chiefly those of World War II—of the world around him. Somehow, the fact that every Menuhin performance still had moments, often extended, of his former greatness only served to make what was perceived as his fall from a condition of perfect artistry more marked and more important.

Not surprisingly, the search for blame began. From the beginning of Menuhin's manhood, the responsibility for whatever troubles he might have had was placed on his parents; the autocratic sway they had held over their son's prodigy years had offended many, and the offended were quick to retaliate. Then his relatively uncultured first wife was blamed for not being fit to be the partner of a great artist; still later, his quite cultured second wife was blamed for continuing the tyrannical oversight of Menuhin that his parents had begun when he was but an infant. And of course, Menuhin himself, self-centered, egotistical, proud, often heedless of the lives of those closest to him, was also held culpable for the failures in his playing.

So now we have the Palmer book and film. Palmer uses music only as a background for the story he wants to tell; as a result scant attention is paid to Menuhin's prodigy career, and not very much more to what later happened musically. Indeed, a major part of the Palmer film—and of the book, too—is an unending succession of complaints from Yaltah and the other relatives, and even from Menuhin's wife Diana, about how sorrowful the inner lives of Yehudi and those attached to him have proven to be. The burden of the charge is simple: Yehudi, and his sisters, were never allowed to be mere children, loved, protected, and indulged as mere children. Instead Yehudi and his sisters were always being groomed, not just to be artists but cultivated adults. They were made to learn languages, made to read, and, of course, made to be musicians. They must always be representatives of the family to a worshipful world; theirs was the responsibility, and theirs, if they were good, was to be the glory. The adults they met were always of some future use to the children, and especially, of course, to Yehudi. He was always the heir to a throne of art; his sisters were always part of the royal family; his parents, strong, bright, and willful, were always regents in the cause of the great future.

The basic charge, it goes without saying, was that Menuhin, along with his sisters, was never allowed the rights and privileges of childhood. Yaltah and Menuhin's younger offspring and relations directly relate his coldness and distance toward them to the hothouse conditions of his, and their, upbringing. Thus, Palmer writes:

> Within the man hides the child, whose early years were not a time of unblemished happiness, but often of unremitting agony. This is the story of a man whose childhood betrayed him, yet who, even now, in his seventy-fifth year, cannot face that understanding. . . .
>
> His younger sister [Yaltah] told me: "One felt as if no one was there [to help]. You could knock and knock [at the door of the "family"]. But it was like a prison door. A door made of stone. You could knock and knock and nothing would happen, except you would hurt your knuckles. Every child goes through a period of great need, of feeling someone should be there. If not a mother, then a teacher or a friend or a relative. In our case, no one was ever there."

But on this account, it was not just that no one was ever there to succor the children. In addition, the children were forever being educated. As Palmer writes of the family's stay in the early 1930s in Paris:

> Marutha also saw to it that the children had intensive instruction in the French language, not by any old teacher who just happened to pass by, but by one of France's most notable authorities on the French language, Félix Bertaux, who was working at the time on what was to become the definitive French-German dictionary. Hephzibah, then aged twelve, was asked to translate a collection of poems by

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> Hölderlin into French. The result (according to Yehudi) gave "Hephzibah much pleasure." No doubt it did, but I'll bet she preferred riding her bicycle. If she ever had time, that is, because there were also the Italian lessons, the Russian lessons and the philosophy lessons. A fresh language every summer was the plan. No wonder Yaltah could later say: "Childhood is such a short time that we should have been allowed to take advantage of it. . . . Certainly we never knew, until it was much too late, how utterly isolated we were, that we were not living the life of children at all."

Certainly the Menuhin children's parents did try to control every aspect of their children's lives. They read their mail, and decided which children might be brought into the royal presence to serve as playmates. They even—horrors!—isolated the children from the popular culture of the day. An extraordinary example of the high-culture cocoon in which the Menuhin children lived is shown by an interview Palmer conducted for the film with the almost seventy-five-year-old Yehudi and his mother, at the time in her late nineties. In the presence of his mother's formidable personality, he immediately becomes a little boy, at once shamefaced and knowing.

The conversation turns to whether Yehudi had ever read children's literature:

> Once, in my presence [Palmer begins], Marutha told Yehudi that she had never *forbidden* him to read *Mother Goose* or any other such "silly stories." Yehudi had just never been interested. "No, that's not true," Yehudi retorted, to Marutha's evident astonishment. "I remember a short span when I used to read Sunday comics." "You *did?*" she replied in mock astonishment. "Well, only about three or four times," Yehudi said, quickly and apologetically. "Then you must have had a private understanding with your *father*," the old lady said. "No, no," said Yehudi. "It was a *private* initiative." "*Completely* your own?" she enquired defiantly. "*Completely* private initiative," said Yehudi.
>
> An uncomfortable silence followed this exchange. Finally, Marutha asked: "But did you *understand* them?" Yehudi seemed unsure how to reply. After some hesitation he said: "Well, there was one about a father who always got into trouble . . . something about life with father." Marutha did not react. The silence became ever more difficult, until eventually Yehudi admitted: "Yes, it was very naughty. But . . ." The old lady pounced, and to me she said: "You see, I *said* he was mischievous."

One need hardly be a follower of Dr. Freud, let alone Dr. Spock, to realize that Yehudi's childhood was a difficult one indeed. These days, we are, all of us, partisans of happiness, especially for the young. For adults of today, childhood ought to be a utopia, a time of sweet pleasure and innocent indulgence; this attitude, it goes without saying, is the purest nostalgia for a time that never was, and never could have been. The evidence is clear: no less than any other time of life, childhood, whether more happy or less happy, is subject to all the difficulties and the sufferings of the human condition.

But what if an effort had been made by Yehudi's parents to make his childhood, and that of his sisters, more pleasant and more diverting? What if the demands of perfection, musical and otherwise, had not been made on Yehudi, and, to a lesser extent, on his sisters? Is there any reason to think that a happier child would have been a greater violinist?

Alas for the partisans of childhood joys, there is no evidence that happiness makes for the greatest adult accomplishment, and there is no evidence that a happy childhood is a causative factor in producing either a child prodigy or an adult genius. What evidence we have, and it is egregiously limited just because the number of true prodigies and geniuses is egregiously limited, suggests that the prodigies of history —one thinks immediately of Mozart in music and John Stuart Mill in philosophy—were produced by what can only be called the high-culture version of boot

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camp. Mozart's father, Leopold, appears to have been a decent man with his son, but there can be no doubt that the child's life was devoted to music and more music. John Stuart Mill was taught Greek by his insanely strict father when the tiny child was but three years old; Mill's childhood was the most demanding school imaginable, a school that occupied all his waking hours.

The story with musical performers in the twentieth century is similar; mothers—and fathers, too—set impossible musical goals for their talented children, showed them around the world like so many prize animals, and berated them for their failures. There is even a hoary anecdote that makes clear just how lonely and bitter was the life of a child prodigy, in this case a violinist. The late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russian composer Glazunov (at least it was he about whom I was told the story) once heard childish crying coming from a dark corner in a hall of the Moscow Conservatory. Upon investigating, he found a small weeping boy clutching a violin almost larger than himself. When Glazunov asked the child who he was, he sobbed, "I am the *Wunderkind* Rabinovich, and I have lost my mother!"

Rabinovich, of course, is a Russian-Jewish name, and its use in the story I have just told suggests something of the incredible pressure Jewish parents put on their young children to succeed, not just at music, but in such other fields as the sciences and the free professions. Moshe and Marutha Menuhin were in this way exemplars of the drive of Jewish parents to make something of their children and for them. Most of the great violinists of the earlier part of our century were Jewish: of the eight great violinists in the world at the time Menuhin was growing up whom I mentioned earlier, five—Heifetz, Zimbalist, Elman, Szigeti, and Huberman—were Jewish. Whatever the exact differences among their various childhoods, it is undoubtedly true that they did not achieve their youthful and later distinction by attending sports events and summer camp.

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Today the Jewish experience of childhood is no longer an experience of unrelenting demands and pressure. Now Jewish parents, like non-Jewish ones, talk of a child's need for self-expression and for time to be with his peers, of how important it is for a child to learn less from his parents and more from his friends, and of the value, not of how much time the parents spend with their children but of "quality time"—strictly rationed periods when parents do childish things together with their children.

Now that there are no longer any young Jewish Moshe and Marutha Menuhins around, the prodigy torch has been passed eastward—in music as well as in science—to the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Koreans. It is no accident that the most recent violin prodigy—perhaps the first one since Menuhin—is the Japanese Midori, now nineteen years of age, who has been astonishing audiences all over the world for a decade. We hear a great deal these days of the preternatural scholastic success of Oriental children, not just in their homelands, but in America as well. Is their success to be understood as coming from their childish frolicking, or from the discipline under which they are raised?

I began with Shakespeare, and I suppose that the passage from the sonnet I have quoted is usually read as a sad evocation of the joys of youth. But surely another reading of these beautiful words is possible. The time of childhood is open to a kind of learning about serious things, learning that not only will bear fruit immediately but will last a lifetime; childhood is a time when what one learns one does not easily forget. Childhood may seem long to us in years, but from the perspective of a lifetime it is only the twinkling of an eye. The talents that were not cultivated in childhood, the achievements that were sidetracked in favor of mere amusements, the intellectual foundations for adulthood that were not laid—all these, once passed by, cannot be recovered.

And so it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the ineffable beauty which Yehudi Menuhin has given to the world, first as a perfect being in childhood, and then as a marvelously communicative, albeit often cramped and strained, adult artist, owes much to the very facets of his upbringing which the Palmer television program and book hold up to such righteous disapproval. Perhaps it is time to call a halt to the practice of criticizing parents, not just for the failures of their children, but even, as in the case of Yehudi Menuhin, for their achievements. As John Stuart Mill so well understood in his *Autobiography*, when happiness is all, that very all is nothing.

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Art

By the month

by Jed Perl

September

Erwin Pfrang's drawings at the David Nolan Gallery. Although Pfrang was born in Munich just over forty years ago, the packed panoramas of weirdly contorted figures that pour forth from his pencil look like products of the Germany of sixty or seventy years ago. Pfrang's scenes of monstrous, teeming humanity have a vitriolic, nightmarish aura which suggests that this child of the Fifties has steeped himself in the work of Otto Dix, Max Beckmann, and George Grosz, along with the Belgian James Ensor. Taken one by one, Pfrang's figures don't have the succinct graphic elegance of the individuals in the Beckmann or Grosz works in black and white; but his figures, which emerge out of accumulations of light, tendrilly, sketchy lines (which may be in part inspired by the drawings of Joseph Beuys), do suggest a kind of nervous, bridled energy. This series of drawings was inspired by "Circe," the Nighttown section toward the end of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which Pfrang, in a catalogue essay, says has a "structural rhythm [that] is seemingly determined by accumulated masses of detail relating to figures and scenes; now and then the flow of events solidifies into definite form. One cannot speak of stasis, but such moments furnish an occasion to stand and stare." Pfrang follows this idea of a structure that is achieved through accumulation in his drawings, where figures of widely varying sizes and shapes appear above and below and behind and in front of one another to create a lumpy mass of bodies. Pfrang's drawings are full of strange costumes and endless figures posing, pontificating, fornicating. And the way he lets the figures mingle and doesn't worry about relative size or perspective fits the chaos of the "Circe" section, which has been called Joyce's *Walpurgisnacht*. Pfrang's shivering, slightly addled pencil strokes catch the setting, where strange figures appear out of the mist—"A form sprawled against a dustbin and muffled by its arm and hat moves, groans, grinding and growling teeth, and snores again. On a step a gnome totting among a rubbishtip crouches to shoulder a sack of rags and bones"—and so on. Pfrang's drawings are somewhat too random and meandering in their structure—one feels that anything could happen anywhere, which is ultimately not a very satisfying way to feel about what's happening on a sheet of paper. But the references to *Ulysses* (some drawings carry specific page numbers) give these crowded gatherings of will-o'-the-wisp lines a framework. Pfrang is doing curious chicken scratchings on the borders of James Joyce's *Ulysses*; he's doing modernist marginalia.

October

Nicola De Maria's paintings on paper at Galerie Lelong. De Maria (who is much better known in Europe than in the United

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States) uses brilliant Chagallish colors to fill all kinds of surfaces with circles and dots and scumbled lines and starlike and leaflike forms. His subject matter, such as it is, is 1950s intergalactic; he has a way of juxtaposing slabs of color that recalls Hans Hofmann, and some of the bits of imagery (such as a wobbly ladder) evoke Miró. De Maria does De Marias in every size imaginable. He'll take a whole wall (there is one wall work in this show) and paint it deep blue, and then scatter it with twinkling abstract elements. Or he'll scale way down, onto the eight-and-a-half-by-six-inch pieces of paper that make up most of this show. The main gallery is hung with these small paintings on paper. I go around and I enjoy the panache with which De Maria wields colors, textures, patterns—scattering circles over a field, then dabbing spots over the circles, then scratching lines into the paint with a pencil or the wrong end of the brush. In another room there are small paintings in painted frames, the paintings mostly consisting of patterns of triangles in red, orange, yellow, and two blues. De Maria's work has the zest of children's art, and it is not nothing to be able to fill our eyes with a succession of blazing hues. Whether he's working big or small, the work is festive. The effect of a De Maria show is as surefire and as ephemeral as a whole party full of crepe-paper streamers and balloons.

Peter Hristoff's paintings at the David Beitzel Gallery. Why do so many younger artists paint paintings whose surfaces look hard and lacquered, as if whatever is going on in the painting is going on at a great distance from us? These paintings can be representational, such as Joan Nelson's (in which a bit of the top of a tree is seen at the lower edge and above that there is nothing but sky), or abstract, such as Peter Hristoff's, which are rather small works broken up into many smaller compartments by means of an irregular grid. Hristoff's paintings (he was born in 1958) are mazy and labyrinthine, with heavy, often earthy color. Sometimes it seems that we're seeing things going on inside the rectilinear compartments. The bits of texture and squiggly lines that appear in one or more of the compartments suggest life and movement (and often resemble miniaturized versions of the curving, unfurling shapes that appear in David Reed's paintings). Hristoff's paintings have somewhat the look of collages, with differently textured and shaded and shadowed bits juxtaposed. There's a sense of adventure that gets going in these paintings, but the broken-up, Cubist space (which may be derived from the early, hard-edged work of Ad Reinhardt) is rather too predictable, as if Cubism were just a design lesson learned in school. The contrast between the grid and the swirling little elements gets to feel programmatic. And then there is that glassy surface that pushes everything off into a tasteful remote world, that turns it all into Cubism in aspic. That glassy surface (is it some kind of clear varnish? or is the paint mixed with a shiny medium?) is probably Hristoff's idea of authority and finish; but it detaches us from the artist's hand, it muffles everything that's going on in the paintings. Artists may be using such surfaces to suggest their respect for the art of the museums, but the results mostly suggest the artists' respect for the glossy reproductions of museum art in the coffee-table books.

November

Giulio Paolini's installation at the Stein-Gladstone Gallery. Only in Italy, where Sophia Loren is thought the right choice to play an ordinary person, could anything as smashingly elegant as a Giulio Paolini installation be called Arte Povera—poor art. Paolini may not use particularly expensive materials in his installations, but he tosses around whatever props he does use to such glamorous effect and he gobbles up space so cavalierly that high-priced materials are beside the point. (Loren in a cotton housedress is still Loren.) Paolini's latest installation in New York, called "Hic et Nunc," fills the main floor at SteinGladstone with a dazzling three-dimensional emblem of the art

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of painting. The room—deeper than it is wide, completely open on the front end, completely closed at sides and back—is treated like a stage. Approaching the room, we are part of the audience; going into the room, we become part of the drama. The brilliantly white space is dominated by an immense but simple structure—a grid (made of seven pieces of what turns out to be veneered wood) that is jammed into the space so that one corner is pressing against the bottom of the right wall and the diagonally opposite corner is shoved higher up against the left wall. This regularly divided structure functions in Paolini's room the way the pattern of floor tiles or ceiling beams does in a Renaissance painting: it accents the thrust of the space. But since the orthogonals of Paolini's grid are receding at a somewhat skewed angle to the walls and floor and ceiling of the room they lend to the perspective of the space a slightly perverse, mannerist twist. The other elements in Paolini's huge stage set suggest a postmodern Attributes of the Arts: amidst the giant grid there is an easel, a lamp, a heap of canvas; on the back wall two pediments top two canvases that have been attached to the wall—one with its front to us, and empty save for a few lines; one with its back to us—so that the canvases are turned into windows, a literal illustration of the Albertian a-picture-plane-equals-a-window idea. Paolini knows how to present big ideas glancingly, as if they were just passing through his head. As I duck my head to get around the grid and take a closer look at the back wall, I have the slightly giddy sense that I'm becoming a part of the stage set, that I'm caught up in the unbearable lightness of perspective.

Lucas Samaras's "Slices of Abstraction/Slivers of Passion/and/or Mere Decor" at the Pace Gallery. In the catalogue of Samaras's new show, the artist interviews himself and asks, "Don't you dread being trite?" To which the answer is, "Style and accent will defend me." This particular exchange comes at the end of a rather long interview, and it might be interpreted as Samaras's writing his own negative review, except that by setting the critique within the house of mirrors of a self-interview Samaras keeps reminding us that the questions are themselves a style statement, a matter of accent. The effect is to disarm us—that's always the effect when somebody says about himself things that we think about him but dare not say to his face. Samaras is playing with us. (The interview is coyly printed in what looks like typewriter type on onionskin paper, so that we have the feeling that we're reading an original document.) Samaras asks, "What do you think about the avant-garde?" And answers, "It spoils fast"—which is clever. Right after which he asks, "How do you feel about younger artists?" And answers, "If they kiss my hand I'll kiss their crotch"—which tells us that we were stupid to think he was just going to be clever. He talks dirty, he talks philosophy, and he switches back and forth so fast that it's all just brittle little fragments in which we dare not presume to find a pattern or a direction. His work has that air, too. The main attraction in this show is a new group of abstractions, called *Mosaic Paintings*, which are made of many pieces of painted canvas that have been glued together—mosaicked—on pieces of board. But around these new works Samaras has arranged an anthology of earlier abstractions, dating all the way back to some drawings that he did in high school in the early Fifties. One of those high-school drawings has bright patterns that are juxtaposed in ways that don't look all that different from the arrangements in the new paintings, and the fact that Samaras includes this juvenilia suggests that he likes the resemblance, that he wants us to understand that everything he does has equal weight, equal value. The new paintings don't look all that different from the sewn paintings that Samaras did in the 1970s (a few of which are included here). In the *Mosaic Paintings* Samaras juxtaposes colors and textures, and he includes a few figurative elements (a hand holding a hypodermic needle, a finger dripping blood) that may allude to the AIDS epidemic. The paintings—some of which are irregularly

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shaped and include cutouts—have been carefully put together, and what holds us is Samaras's evident absorption in the activity of arranging pieces of canvas painted in bright acrylic next to one another. The paintings suggest enigmatic gameboards, and in this sense the work reminds me of psychedelic art, of all the interweaving Tantric-influenced arabesques and mazes that were created in the 1960s and 1970s as visual analogies to a personal journey of discovery. Samaras's work has the weird prettiness and the impenetrable self-absorption of psychedelic art. We watch as Samaras embarks on a visual journey, but it is in the very nature of his narcissistic appeal that we do not presume to understand where that trip begins or ends. Sometimes Samaras's main achievement seems to be not what he's doing but the fact that he's persuaded us to watch him do it. In the *Mosaic Paintings* the colors and textures interview one another. And we eavesdrop as best we can.

December

Selected Works from the Contemporary Realist Gallery of San Francisco, at the New York Academy of Art. The centerpiece of this exhibition of works from a San Francisco gallery that specializes in representational art is Gabriel Laderman's recent male nude, *Brian as Helios.* Completed after the paintings that were in Laderman's show at the Robert Schoelkopf Gallery a little over a year ago, it is more satisfying than any one work that was in that show. The model, who is mostly outlined in black, stands, feet apart, arms apart, hands clenched. The pose is forceful yet immobile, and the main drama is in the way that the massive torso, in sunburned flesh tones heavily worked in black, is set against the jumpy yellow of the back wall. It's a studio nude; but the unreality of that high-pitched background color and the way the articulation of the figure breaks into calligraphic passagework carries the model Brian into his role as Helios, the Greek god of the sun. He's a beautiful, imposing, somewhat fearsome figure, and when I read in a classical dictionary that Helios was "a celebrated favorite of the emperor Nero, put to death by order of Galba, for his cruelties," I thought it possible that Laderman had that Helios in mind, too, when he painted this sensual, violent, late-classical man. Laderman's brushwork here is heavy and choppy, but there is neither the overworked feeling of the large *Family Romance* paintings in the last show, nor the flashiness of some of the female nudes in that show. This is Laderman's first large-scale male nude, and it is a relief to see him getting away from the old subject of the female model in the studio. Laderman appears to be caught up in this image of male force, and the rich articulation of the torso and the head (which is the first head that Laderman has ever painted eloquently) turns into a series of near-abstract meditations on the beauty of muscle, the beauty of flesh. The painting is about male beauty and power, but it is not about sex. All Laderman's previous successful figures have been puppet-like, reminiscent in their scale and jerky movements of the not-quite-human figures of the Japanese Bunraku theater. This is the first Laderman figure that has a free-standing authority: Helios presses toward us, a dense, weighty mass. Looking at the painting, I feel that Laderman is following his instincts as he turns this studio nude into a metaphor for the sun and for male force, and it's an artist's willingness to follow a painting idea into regions where he hasn't been before that sets *Brian as Helios* apart from everything else that's included in this show. There are other artists in the show whose work I have followed with interest and will continue to follow with interest, but the event as a whole, aside from the Laderman, is a graveyard. Realism—or whatever one wants to call the mixed bag of Neoclassical and Neobaroque and more or less painterly work that they show at the Contemporary Realist Gallery—need not be a graveyard. Laderman's painting proves the point.

Philip Taaffe's paintings at the Gagosian Gallery. If you can get beyond the announce-

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ment, which reproduces a photo of Taaffe at work in one of the huge rooms in his palace in Naples; if you can get beyond the exhibition brochure, which includes such Taaffe pensées as "From Matisse's comfortable armchair to Rouault's 'painting is like a prayer'"; if you can get beyond the executive-suite elegance and uniformed guards that set the tone at the Gagosian Gallery —well, it's evident that Taaffe is a better painter than he was a few years ago. He has gotten over his rehashes of Barnett Newman and Bridget Riley, the first works he exhibited in that rather strange technique of his which consists of hand-printing designs on paper and then pasting the paper onto canvas. He still alludes to the patterns of Islamic tiles and Mediterranean wrought iron, as he was doing in his last show in New York, but he now seems to be interested in transforming and extending those patterns rather than merely quoting them. A lot of the paintings are still little more than wall coverings, but in a couple of works in this show Taaffe is turning into a creditable abstract painter. *Kaleidoscope*, about 120-inches square, is collaged out of many smaller squares, each decorated with a meandering, looping calligraphic line that resolves into a delicate centralized design. The canvas, covered with these decorative fancies in pale colors, has a twinkling, fantastical elegance. The best painting in the show is *Cinema Posillipo*. This painting consists of two vertical canvases, brought together to make up a seventy-six-inch-wide horizontal composition. Here the surface is divided into twelve equal areas, which are filled with a repeating pattern of collaged shapes, one a sort of crown shape, the other a bonelike shape. These collage forms, in clear colors such as green, orange, purple, pink, lime, and tangerine, are set against a murky, mottled background; and what holds me is how the repeated shapes add up to a crisp, rhythmic movement that carries through the painting's twelve compartments. The shapes are obviously done with an eye trained on Arp's reliefs and Matisse's cutouts; the rhythm of clean colors recalls Ellsworth Kelly's work of the early 1950s. The sensibility isn't quite as spare and ascetic as Kelly's, but it has some of his quality of an intelligent meditation on great modern ideas. It's interesting that Philip Taaffe, who's known for works that present originality as a shadowy illusion, has now actually done something that feels a wee bit original. It's interesting that this artist who's been known for his way of turning out wistfully ironic replicas of modern-art styles has begun to move beyond irony. How far beyond irony Taaffe can go, and whether he can stay there—this remains to be seen. He has a lot to answer for; then again, there's nothing wrong with learning on the job.

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Theater

By way of L.A.

by Donald Lyons

In the 1950s, the silver age of the American musical, the prolific dramatist Arthur Laurents was on the scene at some interesting moments. In 1957, he wrote the book for *West Side Story*. This book was not so vital a contribution as that of Jerome Robbins (conception, choreography, direction) or Leonard Bernstein (music) or Stephen Sondheim (lyrics). Indeed, the book limps; what survives in *West Side Story* is the street energy already present in Robbins's *Fancy Free* and Bernstein's *On the Town*, both of 1944. But Laurents was there.

And too, in 1959, Laurents wrote the book for *Gypsy*, a savage picture of backstage life dominated by a Medea-like stage mother. The Stephen Sondheim-Jule Styne score made *Gypsy*, but Laurents's book served them well. In 1949 Laurents had written, for the German director Max Ophuls, a movie called *Caught*, in which he created a convincing Howard Hughes-like millionaire psychopath, memorably played by Robert Ryan. Laurents has, then, been capable of tough work.

Nick & Nora, an original musical that recently lasted but a week at the Marquis Theater after a much-postponed opening, was wholly Laurents's responsibility. He billed himself as "author/director" and his taste clearly superintended the music of Charles Strouse and the lyrics of Richard Maltby, Jr. Odd, though, that the innovator of the 1950s should have concocted such a reactionary dud in the 1990s. "Nick & Nora" are, of course, Nick and Nora Charles, "based on the characters created by Dashiell Hammett and on 'The Thin Man' motion pictures owned by Turner Entertainment Co." The couple are San Franciscan sophisticates—she's rich, he's a gentleman detective—sojourning in Hollywood in 1937 and called on by their movie-star pal Tracy Gardner (obvious name) to solve the murder of a lesbian (I think) bimbo who was blackmailing various movie bigwigs—including Tracy. Nora decides, anachronistically but predictably, that she must detect too, as becomes a liberated woman: "I don't just mix cocktails." Tracy Gardner's first-act would-be showstopper is called "Everybody Wants to Do a Musical"—and this is perhaps the time to note that almost every one of the historical background details in *Nick & Nora* is, if not wrong, then fuzzy: stars in fact eschewed musicals in 1937; Tracy is advised to avoid "Barbara Stanwyck" homicidal mannerisms years before Stanwyck played her first killer in 1944's *Double Indemnity*; somebody says, "Scott Fitzgerald lives two bungalows down and you know what happened to him," long before it did in fact happen. (This nitpicking is what one does when undistracted by any life on stage.)

Nick & Nora's notion of style was having the whole company dress up in trenchcoats for a number called "Detectiveland" and, later, put on overcoats and homburgs for a number called "A Busy Night at Lorraine's." Its notion of story verged on sur-

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realistic incoherence. Toward the end, for instance, detective Nora insists that the whole cast attend a tawdry nightclub revue in the expectation that the killer will there reveal himself by shooting the singer, a bombshell with "a very nice pair of maracas." When nothing is clarified at the club, all repair to Tracy's terrace, which overlooks Los Angeles purpling in twilight. Nora knows; Tracy confesses, swooning into the arms of her pseudo-Japanese houseboy. (Tracy had killed her Joseph P. Kennedy-esque studio boss when she saw that he was never going to divorce a nasty, pious Rose-type. Don't ask.) Nora quickly abandons a vestigial near-affair with a swarthy smoothie (a labor racketeer, I think) and croons: "Let's go home and chill the gin, / get undressed and order in." The actors, stiff, frightened, charmless, even *looked* awful: the usually sprightly Christine Baranski as Tracy had a hard brittleness; the arch Joanna Gleason as Nora seemed dressed as and moved with the ponderousness of Queen Mary; the saturnine Barry Bostwick as Nick behaved like the head-waiter at that seedy club.

The joyless slavery of *Nick & Nora* to the dreariest and deadest conventions of the detective genre was particularly salient in light of the recent *City of Angels*, a witty musical reshuffling of some of those very conventions. Larry Gelbart, the creator of *City of Angels*, chose, more shrewdly, the Los Angeles of the 1940s; he split the stage between a mystery writer and the writer's tough-guy detective; he found a theme (even if it was pop culture's favorite candy —the horrors of the blacklist). And he was funny. *City of Angels*, in its self-reflexive play with the very act of writing a mystery, actually demonstrated the obsolescence of the simple dramatized mystery.

Laurents's project was thus a dubious, not to say doomed, one, even had it been informed by mind. Furthermore, *The Thin Man*, Hammett's last book, written in 1934, is not one of his strongest. Sophistication is a weak card for the American detective story to play; it is one better left to Dorothy Sayers. Nick was Hammett's cleaned-up, upper-crustified, painlessly alcoholic dream of himself; Nora was his similarly refracted image of Lillian Hellman. (Fitting, then, that the *Thin Man* movies should now be owned by Ted Turner, husband of Jane Fonda, who impersonated Hellman in the film *Julia*, which reverently proffered as truth a mendacious Hellman fantasy from her book *Pentimento*. I apologize, but the mind does wander at something like *Nick & Nora*.)

Hammett's truest vein was not ersatz Charles charm but a monosyllabic blend of nihilism and stoicism that found voice in his prole detective Samuel Spade, described as looking "rather pleasantly like a blond satan" in the first paragraph of *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). But the laconic spareness of even this successful idiom too often seems like emptiness. There is justice in Edmund Wilson's comparison of *The Maltese Falcon* to "those newspaper picture-strips in which you follow from day to day the ups and downs of a strong-jawed hero and a hard-boiled but beautiful adventuress."

For language that sings and a moral vision that hoists the detective novel into literature, it is to Hammett's successor, Raymond Chandler, that one must turn. Chandler brought life to Hammett's mannerisms, marrying the ethos of Spade to the first-person narration of Nick Charles ("I was leaning against the bar in a speakeasy on Fifty-second Street . . .", begins *The Thin Man*). The famous opening of Chandler's first novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939), is an example of the qualities I mean. And it never fails to cheer me up:

> It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills. I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars.

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And Chandler can expand Hemingwayesque diction and cadence to encompass a Los Angeles immeasurably more real than the cardboard flats of the likes of *Nick & Nora*:

> Bunker Hill is old town, lost town, shabby town, crook town. Once very long ago, it was the choice residential district of the city, and there are still standing a few of the jigsaw Gothic mansions with wide porches and walls covered with round-end shingles and full corner bay windows with spindle turrets. They are all rooming houses now. . . . In the tall rooms haggard landladies bicker with shifty tenants. On the wide cool front porches, reaching their cracked shoes into the sun, and staring at nothing, sit the old men with faces like lost battles [*The High Window*, 1942].

Brecht's *Galileo* has received an intelligent, handsome production at the Jean Cocteau Repertory. Director Eve Adamson used Charles Laughton's 1947 version (confected with Brecht in Los Angeles) of this labile text; she kept Hanns Eisler's original music, newly arranged by Joseph Blunt. The thing played clearly and attractively in John Brown's sets and Jonathan Bixby's costumes. Three singers set the scene in Padua in 1609, where Galileo, age forty-six, cleverly expounds the Ptolemaic and the Copernican universes to his very young pupil Andrea. Greedy and heedless, Galileo goes to Venice to talk the Senate into buying "his" telescope for use in naval warfare; in fact, the telescope, mass-produced by the Dutch, is being hawked in the streets. Venice here is lit low, with long shadows; the potentates wear Veronese reds, browns, ochers, with backs to the audience. Galileo despises his clients ("businessmen bore me") and declares that his discovery of the moons of Jupiter has ousted God from the heavens and placed him "within ourselves or nowhere."

Warned not to go to Florence ("The monks are in power there"), he trots off hubristically ("Going to Mass is a small price to pay for a full belly") to a city lit from above and a populace clad in plain grays and blacks, as of Pollaiuolo. The little Florentine prince, in a chair with back to audience, is kept from looking at Galileo's scientific toys, although the astronomer pleads that truth is the daughter of time and not, as Aristotle had had it, of authority. Then to Rome, a nightmare world in stark garish colors and bare lighting: mocking monks in black; masked, ambiguous cardinals in red; later, a pope being vested all in white by black-clad Inquisitors while he lets himself be wooed from an earlier endorsement of free scientific inquiry to an agreement that Galileo be shown the instruments of torture to hush him up about his heretical heliocentrism. A superb visual counterpoint to this scene is one where Galileo, reviled, shouts defiantly, "The earth revolves," and is left alone on an empty stage with the blaring naked sun, impersonated by a blinding spotlight (there is a metatheatrical pun here, for he had earlier refused to investigate sun spots).

Harris Berlinsky got the intellectual energy, the investigative passion, of the hero; his best moments were the large public bursts of didactic excitement or humiliated pathos. If he was a bit less clear and convincing about the slippery, avaricious, gluttonous, *homme-moyen-sensuel*, who-cares-about-the-sun-let's-have-a-goose side of Galileo, then so, it must be said, is the Laughton-Brecht script. (Although it is easy to imagine the impersonator of the voracious Henry VIII filling out this textual lacuna on a stage.) The forceful and brilliant Craig Smith shone, as usual, in this production, as Cardinal Barberini, at first friend to science but later the waffling Urban VIII.

Galileo is a play of vivid, often vividly didactic, moments, but it lacks the mastered complexity of a masterpiece. Brecht seemed unable, as Olivier said of Hamlet, to make up his mind—that is, about what he thought of the astronomer. Apparently in the first version of *Galileo*, produced in Zurich in 1938, Galileo's seeming surrender to the Inquisition while secretly writing and then smuggling abroad his summa was presented as wise dissimulation. The contemporary

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model in 1938 was a scientist smuggling out the truth about Nazi Germany. In 1947 Hiroshima was on Brecht's mind; Galileo is now both craven opponent and debased servant of Rome (read America). At one moment, this Galileo is mouthing agitprop about how science must and will ease the lot of the peasants; a while later, he supinely crawls before the class enemy and endorses the suppression of heliocentric theory, which will certainly, if broadcast, cause the peasants to revolt. (The choral ditties, scored by Eisler, echo this party line.) There seems to be a sense, only half-conscious, that Galileo should have scampered off to Amsterdam (read Moscow) to put his (atomic?) wizardry at the service of the people. Klaus Fuchs is, *avant la lettre*, the model here.

The chorus laments that, but for Galileo's cowardice, "an Age of Reason could have begun." Galileo, similarly hard on himself, refuses the belated homage of his penitent disciple, who praises the master's silence and cunning. No, no, "I was afraid of physical pain. . . . I sold out. . . . had I put up a fight, it could have had wide repercussions." We seem to be left in this version with a puritanical utopianism that insists on a priggish and hypocritical denunciation of Galileo for his very humanity. Brecht, pampered first in Hollywood and later in the hell of East Berlin and cushioned with secret Swiss bank accounts, was no one to upbraid Galileo. In his best work—*Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Good Woman of Setzuan*—Brecht rather incorporates or faces or absolves or plays with the sleazily imperfect, comfort-loving side of himself (and of everybody). In *Galileo* he just points an unconvincing finger. We never even get to *see* much of Galileo's love of life, anyway; it is a mere datum. And the accusatory tone against Galileo got shriller and shriller in subsequent Berliner Ensemble productions. Since Brecht never made his peace with Galileo, rhetoric rushed in where affection was afraid to dwell.

Even so, I read with dismay that, after this version's Broadway première in 1947 with Laughton in the title role, the egregious New York Drama Critics put it in Siberia in their voting for the "foreign play" award. The tally went: Terence Rattigan's *The Winslow Boy*, 14; Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Respectful Prostitute*, 5; Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says "No!"*, 3; Michéal MacLiammóir's *Where Stars Walk*, 2; *Galileo*, 1. One scents here critics rejecting not Brecht's flaws but precisely his innovatory virtues.

Once again, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the artistic and emotional strength of a Jean Cocteau production. This is a company that always sets one to thinking, to feeling, sometimes even to disagreeing, about the challenging dramas they enterprisingly present. And thought, especially, is a rare joy in theater today.

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Books

Braving time

by Cleanth Brooks

The Enemy's Country is a remarkable little book; in fact, it is remarkable in several significant ways.[1] Coming as it does from the pen of the distinguished British poet Geoffrey Hill, one might expect it to be well written, as indeed it is. It is also a notably learned book, demanding a patient and inquiring reader. The problems discussed are nothing less than the problems of writing and reading clearly, not only as they have shown themselves in centuries past but as they are agonized over today, often rather fruitlessly.

Based on the Clark Lectures that Hill delivered at Cambridge University in 1986, *The Enemy's Country* is a model of what an important series of lectures should be, meticulously researched and brilliantly written. Hill conducts an extremely able discussion of an ancient problem: how to handle words so as to make one's meaning clear, accurate, and expressive; how in doing so to take due account of the way in which context affects the choice and placing of words; and, finally, how to respond to the many other circumstances that impede clarity and communication: hostile readers, political pressures, even mere grumbling ignorance.

Hill has elected to consider such problems primarily through an examination of seventeenth-century English literature. He lets the twentieth-century reader see how a Donne or a Henry Wotton, a William Walton, a Marvell, or a Dryden managed to write with deftness and candor in spite of the manifold difficulties he faced. Indeed, this little volume contains some very pretty instances of rhetorical analysis in which an excellent contemporary poet points out the skill with which some of the master stylists of three centuries ago solved particular problems; sometimes, where earlier drafts have been preserved, it becomes plain that it took more than one attempt before they achieved success.

Hill's title and most of his principal illustrations are drawn from seventeenth-century English literature, a period he clearly knows well and can speak about with familiar ease. Nevertheless, even though not one of our own vaunted masters of "theory" is mentioned, *The Enemy's Country* also has great contemporary relevance. For the problem around which Hill's discussion revolves—ultimately, the problem of how to coax meaning from the recalcitrant medium of language—is much mooted today. Moreover, descendants of the Enemies to whom Hill's title alludes—those pedants castigated by the Elizabethan pamphleteer Thomas Nashe—are still very much with us. William D'Avenant, in the preface to *Gondibert* (1651), described "a vast field of Learning, where the Learned . . . lye . . . malitiously in Ambush." Those perpetually well-popu-

1 *The Enemy's Country: Words, Contexture, and other Circumstances of Language*, by Geoffrey Hill; Stanford University Press, 153 pages, $22.50

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lated fields are the Enemy's Country that Hill expertly negotiates.

In the seventeenth century, the world of literary creation was powerfully involved with the worlds of state, of politics, and of commerce, where Tudor and Stuart authors often had heavy investments. The dean of a great cathedral might also be a great poet; a fine lyric poet might also serve for years as a member of parliament; he might even write some piercing satires on political affairs; ambassadors were capable of producing charming lyrics or powerfully dramatic sonnets.

If we compare the English seventeenth century with our own, British or American, we will soon discover that the earlier age provided its authors and readers with fully as many problems of composition as are found today. Indeed, the fact that it is often difficult to persuade words to express what we want them to is hardly a twentieth-century discovery. As Hill shows, seventeenth-century writers were fully aware of the problematic nature of language. For example, the young John Milton, in his tribute "To Mr. H. Lawes on his Aires," struggled to find the proper words with which to set forth his praise. In a skillful and detailed examination of this poem, Hill notes that Milton's "praise" did not achieve its final form without much trial and error, and that it is, even now, not impeccable. "Milton's drafts show him worrying at his phrasing, here and elsewhere in the sonnet," Hill writes. "In line three he first wrote 'words with just notes, whch till then usd to scan' and then tried 'when most were wont to scan'. In line eight he changed 'that didst reform thy art, the chief among' to 'That with smooth aire couldst humor best our tongue'."

Hill knows his seventeenth-century authors—their poems, essays, even their letters—so well that he can carry forward his argument through a wide range of appropriate quotations. He knows not only what his authors wrote but also what they had read. This knowledge enables him to comment perceptively and with full authority on the various styles they adopted when they wrote. For example, Hill notes that Sir Henry Wotton had alluded to a certain passage in the *Annals* of Tacitus in which the "doomed historian Cremutius Cordus" points out that the victorious party had not removed the statues of the dead Brutus and Cassius. Cordus, "facing his unjust judges, honours the memory of Brutus and Cassius." But Hill is aware that Wotton also makes reference to this speech and that his reference is quite different in tone from that used by Ben Jonson, "who, in Act III of *Sejanus*, closely paraphrases Cordus' speech from the *Annals*, [and] is full and direct where Wotton is laconic and oblique."

Consider another instance of Hill's thoroughgoing control of his subject matter. Hill mentions a passage in *The Advancement of Learning* in which Bacon asserts that it is to be accounted an instance of discretion rather than weakness when a man "would not dispute his best with *Adrianus Caesar*; excusing himselfe, *That it was reason to yeeld to him, that commaunded thirtie Legions.*" Hill shows this to be a richer text than we might have supposed. He knows that Montaigne refers to this passage in his *Essays* and that Florio translated the essays into English. In fact, the passage became very well known. Dryden alludes to it in *A Defence of an Essay of Dramatick Poesie* and in his preface to *All for Love*. Referring to authors from Samuel Johnson and Nicolas Boileau to the American philosopher C. S. Peirce, Hill goes on to explore the whole matter of the writer's freedom and the various possible responses to the forces that threaten that freedom.

The ways in which Dryden responded to such outside pressures and how "those processes shaped his style" become the materials out of which Hill writes his fourth chapter, which he calls "Dryden's Prize-Song." (The specific prize song is Dryden's poem "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham.") This chapter ends with a brilliant exposition of that poem. Except for the fact that I dislike the term, I would be tempted to say that Hill has given us a superb demonstration of "The New Criticism" here. It is per-

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haps better simply to say that he provides a fine account of Dryden's control of tone, his management of praise for the young poet, now so early dead, especially his refusal to over-praise this able but unseasoned young man. "Sincerity," as Hill observes, "is a complex, not a simple state." Not to claim too much for the young poet is really a mark of the respect in which the older poet regards his fine young rival.

The fifth and last chapter of *The Enemy's Country*, "Envoi (1919)," deals largely with Ezra Pound. This might seem an odd subject with which to conclude a study of language as the seventeenth-century writers wrestled with it. Yet Pound's rhetorical adventures are linked quite neatly and fittingly with those of his predecessors. We are reminded at once that Pound held in the highest esteem "the melody of Waller's 'Go Lovely Rose' which had been set by Milton's friend and collaborator, the Royalist musician Henry Lawes." Hill also notes that Pound was deeply influenced by "the theory and practice of the nineteenth-century French poet Théophile Gautier" and that among the "English poets of the generation immediately preceding his own Pound singled out Lionel Johnson as one with 'similar ambitions' to Gautier." Yet clearly what most concerns Hill about Pound is his attempt to find a usable past: to discover for an age that had apparently played itself out vital, revivifying connections with the past and its art. Pound, of course, was not the only modern poet who faced this predicament or who struggled to "make it new"; undoubtedly Hill could have chosen other poets who battled for a new and living poetry to illustrate his thesis. But a careful reading of this final chapter will convince most readers that Pound was a wise choice.

For one thing, Pound early on recognized that he was living in "Enemy Country": among people who thought that the past was dead, and so wanted nothing to do with it, or—even worse—who thought that all true art *ought* to be dead. Pound himself believed that art ought to be able to make certain moments live—really live—not simply pass agreeably; art for him was not something with which to doze away the vacant hours. What was this ardent, and quite occasionally rambunctious, young poet to do? Hill thinks that Pound indicated how those moments might live by writing such verses as:

> As roses might, in magic amber laid,
> One substance and one colour
> Braving time.

If the reader feels that "braving time" is a small accomplishment, a kind of little lyrical trinket, Hill promptly sets him straight. "What is 'braving time'? It is to challenge, to defy, with a tincture of 'bravura', the 'display of daring or defiance; brilliancy of execution', as in 'a passage of music requiring great skill and spirit in its execution, written to task the artist's powers'. 'Envoi (1919)' is a bravura performance." Hill's definition of "bravura" (taken from *The Oxford English Dictionary*) is entirely apposite here. Whatever Pound's subsequent deficiencies and mistakes amounted to, Hill has caught the essential import of the young poet's search for a way out of the "Enemy's Country." He sums it up for us as follows:

> As I see it, Pound sets himself the task, as much in this poem ["Envoi (1919)"] as in *The Pisan Cantos* some twenty-five years later, of transposing 'bravery' from the domain of the merely 'sincere' (which is ephemeral and solipsistic) into a form of 'substance' and 'colour' successfully detached from the ephemeral.

Even if, as Hill suggests, Pound was not entirely successful in his ambition, the direction and nobility of his poetic effort remains perfectly clear.

While Hill could have drawn his illustrations from almost any period, it is well that he chose to discuss these problems of rhetorical accommodation and persuasive style largely against a temporal background cen-

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turies earlier than our own. Many of our most celebrated literary "theorists" today seem to want us to believe that rhetorical complexity was discovered *circa* 1960. The essential problems are not new but very old, dating at least from the time of the Greek Sophists. The fact that words are slippery, that they readily change their meaning from context to context, that they can often not be trusted to bear the precious weight of truth: these are not novel observations. What is perhaps new is the blithe assumption that such difficulties condemn us to living in an Enemy's Country of irremediable incoherence. It is part of Geoffrey Hill's achievement to have faced up to such difficulties of language without succumbing to them. In his Clark Lectures he has shown with exquisite vividness how writers from another era waged their rhetorical battles, how they lost some and won others. In so doing, he has not only made a valuable contribution to literary history but has also provided us with a rich and thoughtful commentary on problems as enduring as they are currently fashionable.

An individual publisher

Michael Ermarth, editor Kurt Wolff: A Portrait in Essays and Letters. Translated from the German by Deborah Lucas Schneider. University of Chicago Press, 223 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Martin Greenberg

Publishers aren't often remembered; in most cases, why should they be? But Kurt Wolff, who died in 1963, is one of the exceptions. In this country he is remembered as the German émigré publisher who started Pantheon Books in 1942, during World War II, and made it into one of the most distinguished American publishing houses—"distinguished" here meaning that it published serious works of literature (mostly foreign) and no junk, a definition that eliminates most homegrown publishers. Nor did Pantheon have its publishing way smoothed for it by a rich man's money. Houses supported by angels publish good books but suffer as a rule from some kind of artificiality, preciosity, lack of vigor; it is the price paid for being cut off from economic realities which in their own way reflect spiritual realities. Wolff had had money of his own when he began his publishing career, but Pantheon was launched with very reduced means.

Wolff did his own publishing, he didn't rely on editors to do it for him. He listened to advisors, and of course he had (in time) a staff—to judge by the one member I knew, the highly cultivated, capable, extraordinarily kind Wolfgang Sauerländer, it must have been an unusual one. Wolff saw a role for himself in the U.S. as a pioneer of great European writing for the most part still unknown here. Pantheon, publishing mainly German writers at first, put out translations of Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, Stefan George, Friedrich Hölderlin, Adalbert Stifter, Charles Péguy, Paul Valéry, a volume of Marc Chagall lithographs, to mention only a few names. He scored a first success with a complete edition of the Grimms' *Fairy Tales*. With one of his rare American titles, Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *Gift from the Sea*, he had his first best-seller.

A sharp nose for what is important as well as superior led to his publishing Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, which, altogether unexpectedly, sold in huge numbers. Pasternak asked Wolff worriedly if the Cold War was responsible for the clamor over *Doctor Zhivago*, if his novel was being misused for political ends. Of course it was being used politically, but, as Wolff wrote him, this was a secondary matter; what would prove primary was the novel's superior literary quality (a quality which embraced political values). His last publishing triumph with Pantheon, before his retirement in 1960, was Lampedusa's *Leopard*. Subsequently Pantheon was taken over by Random House and brought into the American big-corporation publishing world; inevitably it lost the individual character Wolff had stamped it with.

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The story of Pantheon Books belongs to American publishing history. However, Kurt Wolff has a place in literary history, thanks to his extraordinary record as a publisher in Germany in the second and third decades of this century. Turning away from an academic career, he threw himself into publishing with a passion at the age of twenty-one, in the years just before the outbreak of World War I. Publishing didn't just mean a nice job to him, it meant, in that period which saw such a great outburst of the new and vital in German and European literature and art, a chance (as he wrote Rilke, a friend, not one of his writers, in 1917)

> to become involved in what seemed to me important, timely, and genuine, to put my most fervent convictions to use, to join the struggle against the Moloch of human stupidity. Need it concern me that a great many publishers already existed—perhaps too many (although their activities seemed to me almost without exception unsatisfactory)? . . . After laboring in the profession myself for a few years, I was in a better position to appreciate the real value of my competitors' work and saw more clearly the frightening number of my own mistakes, but I was able to maintain the conviction . . . that my publishing house could be a mirror of the age, giving the truest reflection of its heart and spirit . . . its hysteria and bizarre distortions, its longing for brotherhood and kindness . . . its hatred of philistines. The truest reflection—although still incomplete and imperfect, even more imperfect than the imperfect age itself.

The spirit of the times that was moving in the young writers whom he made it his business to publish was moving in him too, a spirit of rebellion against the reigning Wilhelmian ideas about art and literature and life, so complacent and mediocre—or to use his word, a word that needs to be revived, philistine. Wolff had taste and was eager to exercise it; he also had good judgment, a level head, natural charm—and modesty. So he was always a successful publisher in his many ventures as well as a superior one. In the first years of the Kurt Wolff Verlag he published Franz Kafka and Franz Werfel, Robert Walser and Karl Kraus, Max Brod and Carl Sternheim, Iwan Goll, Gottfried Benn, Georg Trakl, Georg Heym, Gustav Meyrink, and Heinrich Mann. His firm got labeled as the "House of Expressionism." Expressionism is an inexact term, especially when applied to literary works, and Wolff tells us he always disliked it; with a writer like Kafka it is wildly off the mark. But the meaning lying behind its overt meaning, in those years in Germany, was "modern"—Wolff published the modern writers. That was why, I'm sure, Joyce wrote him in 1920 (signing himself unmodernly as "prof. James Joyce") to offer him a novel (presumably *A Portrait of the Artist*, Wolff couldn't remember forty years after) for translation. The name Joyce meant nothing in Europe in 1920, and Wolff's comment on this long forgotten letter is amusing: "If I had any reaction at all on reading these lines . . . it was probably: Who is this idiotic 'professor' who has written from Trieste in bad German about an English book he wants me to publish in German?"

"As a general rule," Wolff writes, "the books of great writers have not been published by giant companies" but "by small firms, that is to say by individual publishers." If a publisher is to make a contribution to culture, which was always Wolff's main ambition, before all else he needs luck, the luck of finding himself working in a fertile not a sterile time. After that he needs to be well read, not only in the literature of his own language but in others as well. And he needs an independent mind, one that can "distinguish between genuine and counterfeit, between what is original and what is imitation," that can intuit "the meaningful currents of the times, those which will shape the future." This makes my American head spin. I am used to hearing writers tell stories about the illiteracies and asininities of publishers and editors which are like nothing so much as the stories college English teachers tell about their freshman students.

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And then there is Wolff's attitude to the author. "A publisher's relationship with his author must be like a love affair in which he asks nothing and has already forgiven every failing in advance: both small lapses and—as is always possible—unfaithfulness on a large scale." Such a sympathetic attitude arises out of an encouraging nature and a veneration of literature. The stories he tells about the writers he published show a man who was generous, bold, and sometimes quite witty in the way he gave them support. Wolff greatly esteemed Karl Kraus, that Viennese despiser of everything second-rate. But Kraus couldn't be persuaded to become one of Wolff's authors. With his fastidiousness and pride, it was unbearable to him to have his name appear in the catalogue of the Kurt Wolff Verlag side by side with those of the firm's writers whom he thought hacks, warmly though he felt toward Wolff. So matters stood for a year or so till Wolff hit on an original solution: he would set up a publishing house for Karl Kraus alone, one that published only his writings, the "Verlag der Schriften von Karl Kraus (Kurt Wolff)." Kraus accepted the arrangement and was so published for the better part of a decade, the only name appearing in that firm's catalogue being his own.

Wolff's arrangement with Franz Werfel also makes one smile. Here the suggestion came from Werfel. Werfel, even younger than the twenty-four-year-old Wolff, had already published a highly praised book of poems. (It's a pity that the author of "Der Dicke Mann im Spiegel" ["The Fat Man in the Mirror"] gave up poetry to write novels.) Werfel's businessman father thought poetry was a way to sit around cafés at night and sleep late in the morning. He had stopped hoping his son would come into the family business, but he insisted on his keeping regular hours and putting in a day's work of some kind. So Werfel asked Wolff to give him a "position" (as a reader), complete with a contract, to satisfy his father. He agreed at once. Werfel came from Prague to the Kurt Wolff Verlag in Leipzig, where he was hardly ever seen in the office—you could find him at noon at Wilhelm's Wine Bar, later on at the Café Merkur. Which, for Wolff, was as it should be, for Werfel's business was to be "creative."

In 1912, after having sent Werfel to Wolff (then a partner with Ernst Rowohlt), Max Brod showed him some things by Kafka. Kafka, then twenty-eight, had never had anything published, had never tried to have anything published. The publishers said fine, let him send us a manuscript and we'll publish it. As Brod remarked, those were the days. But there was more to it than that; there was good literary judgment, literary conviction behind the ready acceptance. Fifty years later Wolff said: "Whoever had ears to hear could not resist the magical tone of Werfel's early poems, could not help falling immediately under the spell of Kafka's prose." Kafka all his life was of two minds about being published, wanting and not wanting it. A venerator of literature like Wolff, he groaned over weaknesses he saw glaring out at him from his own writing. (But he also wrote: "If I set down a sentence at random, any sentence, for instance 'He looked out of the window,' right away it's perfect.") When Wolff met Kafka later that year, the writer was ill at ease and silent during the visit; on leaving, writes Wolff, "he said something that I have never heard from any author before or since, and that for this reason remained irrevocably linked in my mind with this unique figure: 'I will always be much more grateful to you for returning my manuscripts than for publishing them.'"

Brod badgered the reluctant Kafka and got him to put together a selection of his short pieces which Brod then sent off to Wolff. The short pieces made a short book, so short it had to be published in huge-sized type, the wonderful *Betrachtung* ("Meditation"). I recollect Kafka saying somewhere that upon returning after quite some time to the Prague bookstore that stocked "Meditation," he saw there were ten copies left of the original dozen. "I myself had bought one. Who was the mysterious person who bought the other?"

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Kafka's self-deprecating humor gives an accurate indication of how his work sold in his own lifetime. Yet here is how Wolff wrote to his little-known writer in 1921:

> Our correspondence is infrequent and meager. None of the authors with whom we are associated approaches us so seldom with requests or questions as you do. . . . [T]he apparent lack of concern on the author's part about how his books are faring does not shake the publisher's belief and confidence in their outstanding quality. Among the writers we represent, there are two or three at most . . . whose work affects me so intensely and personally as yours.
>
> Please do not take the visible success [i.e., lack of success] we have with your books as any indication of the effort that goes into selling them. You know as well as we do, that it is usually the best and most estimable works which find little or no echo immediately and must wait for one. . . . You would do me a great favor by allowing us to demonstrate this confidence to the public: let us publish more of your books.

Which Wolff faithfully did. What Kafka on his side had to say about Wolff is also interesting. In a letter (April 5, 1913) to his perennial fiancée, Felice Bauer, he encloses a letter from Wolff begging Kafka to send along "the bug story" and the first chapter of *Amerika* (first published separately as *Der Heizer* ["The Stoker"]), about which he had been told by Brod. Kafka comments on the letter with his usual self-deprecation:

> You can see from the enclosed what a very nice publisher I have. He is a wonderful-looking man of about twenty-five whom God has given a lovely wife, several million marks, a liking for the publishing business and not much of a head for it. [1]

1 Wolff never saw this letter (I presume) because Kafka's letters to Felice Bauer weren't published till after Wolff's death. The English translation (in *Letters to Felice* [Schocken]) misunderstands the last phrase of what I have quoted.

Whoever wants to publish Franz Kafka can't have much of a head for business. How wonderful that Kurt Wolff was there in those years, with his poor head for business!

Footholds in reality

Derek Mahon Selected Poems. Viking/Gallery, in association with Oxford University Press, 194 pages, £14.99

reviewed by Robert Richman

Derek Mahon's *Selected Poems*, published to honor the poet's fiftieth birthday, contains a fine but slightly confusing selection of poems from his six previous books. The collection is confusing because some of the poems are out of order, at least if we take the true order to be that in the original books. This would be a minor matter if the poems themselves were identified by year or book: they are not. What the reader is offered, essentially, is a sequence of poems, many with new titles, uninterrupted by so much as a chapter heading or blank page. This makes the task of tracing Mahon's development a bit difficult for anyone unfamiliar with his work.

The poetry is so splendid, however, that one is more than willing to put aside such editorial qualms. Mahon's connection with his Northern Ireland homeland, like that of his near-contemporary Seamus Heaney, has been tenuous at best. Even though Heaney and Mahon come from opposite sides of the religious fence in Northern Ireland—Heaney was born a Roman Catholic and Mahon a Protestant—both came to resent the artistic compromises forced on them by the political turmoil in their native land. Mahon's birthplace, Belfast, has been the scene of terrible fighting in recent years; Heaney, who was born in County Derry, also spent much of the 1960s—first as a student and then as a teacher—in war-torn Belfast.

The situation has been so bad, in fact, that

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both writers have left Northern Ireland: Heaney for Dublin and Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he now teaches at Harvard, and Mahon for London, where he has worked as an editor and writer for *The Listener*, *New Statesman*, and *Vogue*. To the hard-liners in the North, at least, Heaney's move to the United States and Dublin was deemed only a bit less disgraceful than Mahon's escape to London, which was viewed as consorting with the enemy. In Heaney's case, flight occasioned feelings of guilt and remorse that seeped into his poetry. Mahon's more extreme removal resulted in an imaginative boldness that soon yielded to increasingly mordant reflections on the value and mission of art.

Mahon's more drastic rupture with Irish culture can be seen straightaway in his translations. Where Heaney's major translation project of recent years has been *Sweeney Astray* (1983), a rendering of the medieval Irish epic *Buile Suibhne*, Mahon has focused his attention as a translator on some of the pillars of Continental modernism such as Boris Pasternak, Rainer Maria Rilke, Gerard Nerval, Arthur Rimbaud, and Constantine Cavafy. As Heaney has made clear in his criticism, he himself supports the modernist program. But it seems that he found in *Buile Suibhne* something the modernists do not offer: the voice of the exile who has been forced to flee his home and is unhappy about it.

Mahon, however, has preferred the modernists' more radical form of estrangement, an example of which can be found in his rendition of Rimbaud's *Le Bateau ivre*. In Mahon's version, the speaker is "[d]eaf to the furious whisperings of the sand," and "[c]ontemptuous of the blinking lights ashore." What the boat-riding narrator is contemptuous of and deaf to, of course, is the bourgeois world he has left behind. Unlike Heaney's Sweeney or Dante—or, for that matter, Ovid—the poet of *Le Bateau ivre* is elated that he is free, as he puts it, "of the dull weight / Of cautious crew and inventoried cargo."

As the Irish poet-critic Seamus Deane has observed, Mahon has a "longing to be free from history," especially Irish history. This longing is also evident in Mahon's original poems. In "Grandfather," a poem from *Night-Crossing* (1968), Mahon's first book, the dotty and childlike grandfather is admired, not because he is a vital component of the Irish landscape, or because he is peacefully at one with his family, but because "he escapes us all":

> They brought him in on a stretcher from the world,
> Wounded but humorous; and soon he recovered.
> Boiler-rooms, row upon row of gantries rolled
> Away to reveal the landscape of a childhood
> Only he can recapture. Even on cold
> Mornings he is up at six with a block of wood
> Or a box of nails, discreetly up to no good
> Or banging round the house like a four-year-old—
>
> Never there when you call. But after dark
> You hear his great boots thumping in the hall
> And in he comes, as cute as they come. Each night
> His shrewd eyes bolt the door and set the clock
> Against the future, then his light goes out.
> Nothing escapes him; he escapes us all.

The grandfather resembles the poet himself, in fact, who is "[n]ever there when you"—i.e., his countrymen—"call."

Another image of the poet may be found in "De Quincey in Later Life," a poem about Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859), the English essayist and author of *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. In Mahon's poem, the mature De Quincey visits London and recalls running away to the city as a teenager when his money quickly ran out and he was forced to sleep on the streets and in the parks. De Quincey never could resist the soothing anonymity of large cities; often he would visit London or Paris, as his friend John Ritchie Findlay (1824-1898) observed, to "dwell solitary amid a multitude, buried by day in the cloister-like recesses of mighty

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libraries, and stealing away by night to some obscure lodging." Mahon, too, has felt the urge to flee a provincial setting for the densely populated but hardly intimate city.

But for De Quincey, the great city's libraries and deserted nighttime streets often did not grant adequate relief. In times of dire need he resorted to laudanum, which, as Mahon writes, is

> Excellent as an antidote for toothache
> And the busy streets. Wood crackles better
> In a head removed, and fresh water
> Springs wiselier in a heart that isn't sick.
> And then the Piranesi dreams came, and his children
> Woke him every day at noon—
>
> Until he cried out, 'I shall sleep no more!',
> And quit the hot sheets and the enormous
> Apparitions dying on the floor.
> He left the house,
> Walked out to the sunlight on the hill
> And heard, in the whispering-gallery of his soul,
>
> His own small, urgent discord echoing back
> From dark roads taken at random
> And the restless thunder of London—
> Where he had gone in his eighteenth year
> And walked the embankments after dark
> With Anne, looking for some such panacea.

Although Mahon champions the writer who habitually pursued the "restless thunder" of London, and who walked its "embankments after dark . . . looking for some such panacea," he appears to regard De Quincey's feckless idealism with suspicion. The criticism that is implied in "De Quincey in Later Life" is made explicit in the poems of Mahon's third book, *The Snow Party* (1975). In "Afterlives," a poem from this book, Mahon declares to James Simmons, the poem's addressee: "What middle-class twits we are / To imagine for one second / That our privileged ideals / Are divine wisdom . . ." This rebuke is followed by an account of the now-humbled poet's return to the country he has long avoided:

> I am going home by sea
> For the first time in years.
> Somebody thumbs a guitar
> On the dark deck, while a gull
> Dreams at the mast-head,
> The moon-splashed waves exult.
>
> At dawn the ship trembles, turns
> In a wide arc to back
> Shuddering up the grey lough
> Past lightship and buoy,
> Slipway and dry dock
> Where a naked bulb burns;
>
> And I step ashore in a fine rain
> To a city so changed
> By five years of war
> I scarcely recognize
> The places I grew up in,
> The faces that try to explain.
>
> But the hills are still the same
> Grey-blue above Belfast.
> Perhaps if I'd stayed behind
> And lived it bomb by bomb
> I might have grown up at last
> And learnt what is meant by home.

From now on, such self-censuring is common in Mahon's poetry. But seldom do the poet's reproaches specifically refer, as they do here, to his decision to leave his country. Most of Mahon's rebukes are aimed, rather, at poetry itself. In "The Attic," from *Poems 1962-1978*, he writes: "I who know nothing / Scribbling on the off-chance, / Darkening the white page, / Cultivating my ignorance." And in "The Sea in Winter," from the same book, he observes: "And all the time I have my doubts / about this verse-making." In "Table Talk," meanwhile, from *The Hunt by Night* (1982), he refers to the "ephemeral stream of literature."

And yet, such protests and objections do not mean the end of poetry for Derek Mahon. Instead, he shifts the focus of his verse. It becomes a means, not of dealing with the politics of the North—Mahon never goes that far—but rather of accepting and celebrating the world as it is. This can be

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seen in "A Garage in Co. Cork," from *The Hunt by Night*. This poem about a deserted gas station shows a real inquisitiveness about the lives of the people who once made the ruin their home. It is the kind of inquisitiveness that is not found in his early poetry:

> . . . the cracked panes reveal a dark
> Interior echoing with the cries of children.
> Here in this quiet corner of Co. Cork
> A family ate, slept, and watched the rain
> Dance clean and cobalt the exhausted grit
> So that the mind shrank from the glare of it.
>
> Where did they go? South Boston? Cricklewood?
> Somebody somewhere thinks of this as home,
> Remembering the old pumps where they stood,
> Antique now, squirting juice into a chrome
> Lagonda or a dung-caked tractor while
> A cloud swam on a cloud-reflecting tile.

Mahon's interest in the fate of this family differs sharply from his interest in an old man's detachment from his family in "Grandfather." The last stanza of "A Garage in Co. Cork" shows how immersed Mahon now is in the "intrinsic nature" not only of the things of the world but also of our habitat within it:

> We might be anywhere but are in one place only,
> One of the milestones of earth-residence
> Unique in each particular, the thinly
> Peopled hinterland serenely tense—
> Not in the hope of a resplendent future
> But with a sure sense of its intrinsic nature.

Further proof of Mahon's desire to give the world its due is his decision to change, for inclusion in the present selection, the title of "At the Pool" to "Katie at the Pool." Restoring his daughter's name gives the poem even more of a foothold in reality.

But the imagination has not been banished for good from Mahon's poems. Hardly: in "The Sea in Winter," Mahon imagines London's "frosty pavements" to be "the stones" of a "far-shining star"; earlier in the same poem he "pretend[s] not to be here at all." And in "Tractatus," from *The Hunt by Night*, the poet follows the opening line of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*—"The world is everything that is the case"—with an amendment: "The world, though, is also so much more—/ Everything that is the case imaginatively." Now valuing equally both imagination and reality, and no longer cherishing so much the impertinent exile's stance, Mahon is able, as he writes in "Ovid in Tomis," to concentrate "On the infinity / Under our very noses."

Shorter notices

Cyril Connolly Shade Those Laurels. Concluded by Peter Levi. Pantheon, 174 pages, $20

Like Charles Dickens, Cyril Connolly left among his papers a partly serialized but unfinished murder mystery whose perfectly unknown *dénouement* has proved a long-acting tease to his admirers. Dickens, as Broadway recently reminded us, gave no one the key to his *Edwin Drood*; Connolly, however, unlocked the secret of *Shade Those Laurels* for at least *one* person—the poet and biographer Peter Levi. Now Mr. Levi has edited the three completed chapters of this abandoned *jeu d'esprit*, only the first of which was published by Connolly before his death in 1974; he has also fashioned, from memories of long-ago talks with the author, a plausible if perfunctory conclusion. The result is a somewhat creaky country-house whodunit whose real interest, like that of any memorable mystery, lies quite outside the intricacies of its plot. One picks up this novel to listen one last time to the voice of Cyril Connolly, for, as our narrator says of Sir Mortimer Gussage, this little book's lion and body-to-be, "whatever he [is] saying, his tone [makes] of it a treat, an enlightenment, a special occasion."

Our narrator is a young and talented book

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reviewer who, upon proposing to his paper a birthday tribute to Sir Mortimer, is invited by the master to a family dinner at home. Mr. Levi is quite right, in his introduction, to say that this novel "exists almost entirely for the sake of its amazing dinner party," just as its characters exist almost entirely for the sake of dining—that is, of talking, tasting, and definitively appraising. This party gives us Connolly at his wittiest as his grotesquely overcultivated cast takes up such matters as the best meals described in the Goncourt journals, the most effective aphrodisiacs, the pleasures of keeping a cold-house, and, perhaps most fascinating in the author's working out of it, the proper way to cook an olive stuffed with capers and anchovies. Among this crowd "not a shrimp is peeled without a dissertation, not a sparrow falls to the ground without a post-mortem." And what a crowd! Besides the narrator and the dashing host, they are eight: the beautiful Laurian, Sir Mortimer's daughter; the chic Lady Cressida, his silver-tongued wife; Julian Frere, his no-longer-young disciple; Geoffrey 'Ginger' Bartlett, his randy, shambling publisher; Jane Sotheran, pen-name 'Sacharissa,' a haughty popular novelist; Hugh Curry Rivel, a Peacockian exquisite; Mona Farran, Sir Mortimer's dowdy typist; and Norman, Mona's husband, a gentleman fruit farmer. They are much more like a family than it would first appear, and each, of course, has a perfectly good motive for doing away with Sir Mortimer. And each, to add spice to the plotting, wants more from the callow narrator than he is prepared to give.

The gourmets gathered round Sir Mortimer's table are eager to sample his rare *Actinidia sinesis*, a doubtful brown-green cold-house delicacy, to complete their experience of the gooseberry. In much the same spirit, connoisseurs of English prose will be eager to lift to their noses *Shade Those Laurels*, a gossamer mauve-petaled forced bloom of a novel, to complete their experience of Connolly. They will appreciate its many streaks of high color and will savor, in intermittent whiffs, the characteristically bracing Connolly perfume. For this they will gladly overlook the pronounced droopiness of certain of its leaves, and the bit of Peter Levi's tape on the stem.

—*Christopher Carduff*

Michael Mansbridge John Nash: A Complete Catalogue, 1752-1835. Introduction by John Summerson. Rizzoli, 336 pages, $75

As recently as the 1930s, a curator of the Soane Museum in London described him as "an ignorant rogue in whom no artistic excellence was to be found." But today John Nash is widely recognized as one of the most important English architects of his generation, a dazzling generation which boasted such giants as John Soane himself and Robert Smirke, architect of the British Museum.

Nash was born in 1752 to a Welsh millwright living in Lambeth. His early career was dogged by a bankruptcy and failed marriage, but he quickly recouped, becoming by his late thirties a fashionable and prosperous purveyor of country houses in Ireland as well as England. Nash's architectural vocabulary derived chiefly from the neoclassicism of William Chambers (1723-1796) and Robert Adam (1728-1792). But his eclectic adaptation of these influences—as well as the influence of Uvedale Price (1747-1829), a founder of the Picturesque movement—resulted in an architecture of dignifed whimsy. Thatched cottages and Gothic extravaganzas, neoclassical villas and Indian pleasure palaces: all came tumbling from his drawing board in abundant profusion. In 1796, Nash entered into a brief but highly productive collaboration with the legendary landscape designer Humphry Repton. Soon thereafter he became acquainted with the Prince Regent, the future George IV, who became his protector and chief patron. Because of his close association with the crown—Nash became a trusted advisor on political affairs as well as the King's personal architect—Nash naturally became a promin-

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ent social figure. Mrs. Arbuthnot, the Duke of Wellington's imperious confidante, described him as "a very clever, odd, amusing man, with a face like a monkey."

While Nash's work for the Prince Regent —which included the transformation of a renovated farmhouse in Sussex into the famous Oriental fantasy we know as Brighton Pavilion—brought him great influence, it also won him many enemies. George IV was an extraordinarily unpopular monarch —"The King," Mrs. Arbuthnot observed, "is such a blockhead nobody minds what he says"—and Nash to some extent shared in his unpopularity. In 1825, Nash was put in charge of remaking Buckingham House into Buckingham Palace, a huge project that was incomplete when the King died in 1830. With the King gone, the architect's enemies were finally free, as the Duke of Wellington put it, "to make a hash of Nash." Financial irregularities were discovered in his handling of the Buckingham Palace project—Nash had often been suspected of sharp dealings—and he was summarily dismissed from his position on the Board of Works and replaced as the architect in charge of rebuilding the palace. He died a few years later, in 1835, having withdrawn into a wounded if financially comfortable semi-retirement.

Together with John Summerson's definitive 1980 biography of Nash, this sumptuous inventory provides a comprehensive introduction to the achievement of the archetypical Regency architect. Michael Mansbridge, who died shortly after completing this volume, gathered over 720 illustrations of work by Nash and his circle: photographs where possible, prints or drawings where photos were unavailable. The book also includes dozens of architectural plans, and Mansbridge's informative annotations, along with the biographical sketch by Summerson, remind us that Nash, unlike the meticulous Soane, preferred to work on a large canvas and aimed for overall effect rather than perfection of detail. Indeed, Nash was as much a town planner and urban designer as a creator of individual buildings, and his work laying out Regent's Park, Regent Street ("It will quite eclipse Napoleon," the Prince Regent gloated), Trafalgar Square, and other areas did a great deal to bring the physical texture of modern London into existence.

—Roger Kimball

Editor's note: We wish to call attention to the publication of Paul Berman's anthology *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses* (Laurel/Dell, $8 paper). The essays by Roger Kimball and Hilton Kramer were originally published in *The New Criterion*.

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Notebook

Condescending to Columbus

by James Bowman

In the tenth-century Old English poem that modern scholars usually call *Christ III* there is a striking passage describing the joys of the saved in heaven in contrast with the sufferings of the damned in hell. At the Judgment Day, there will be three "tokens," says the anonymous poet, that the blessed have kept the Lord's will. The first is that they will shine with a brightness greater than the sun's on account of their former deeds; the second is that they will see God in His glory and experience the joys of heaven with the angels; the third is that they will rejoice to see the damned consumed by fire and gnawed by worms as the punishment for their sins and that they will thank God the more eagerly for their own happiness because He didn't damn *them*.

Here is as good a starting place as any for cultivating an understanding of the ways in which the Middle Ages were different from our own age. I mean not just the way in which all ages are different from each other but *really* different. And it is such an understanding that we are badly in need of when we approach the five-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, or Cristóbol Colón, as the politically correct, seeking to remind us of the wicked *colonizer*, tend to call him. Such people quarrel with the word "discovery" itself. Even the official keepers of the Columbus celebration now instruct us to call it an "encounter," which implies a kind of equality between encounterer and encounteree, rather than a "discovery," which implies active and passive parties, somebody doing and somebody else being done to.

This is a lie. It is an attempt to soothe the anti-Columbians, who claim that the Admiral of the Ocean Sea raped a hemisphere, by pretending that the hemisphere wanted it—or at least that the inadvertence on both sides of this particular "encounter" renders it morally neutral. But there is no way that such a position can be honestly sustained. It is true that the importation of European diseases which had such a devastating effect on indigenous populations can hardly be blamed on Columbus, but for the most part whatever happened after the first chance meeting was done *by* the Europeans *to* the Native Americans. It was done deliberately, and its moral meaning cannot be ignored even if not all consequences were intended.

Slavery, gold-lust, cruelty—these things were not accidental. But neither can they be understood precisely as they would be if practiced by our contemporaries. Of course it is not a new thing to say that we mustn't judge fifteenth-century Europeans according to the standards of twentieth-century Americans. It is like censuring Columbus for excluding women and minorities from his crew, or for failing to provide them with health insurance and workmen's compensation. Yet too often this indulgence toward our forefathers smacks of condescension. It is another way of saying that they didn't do too badly according to their lights, if one

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makes due allowances for their primitive morality. It is incestuous etymologically, if in no other way, to patronize our patrimony like this.

Instead we must make an effort of historical imagination in order to understand why they behaved as they did. Only then will we be in a position to judge them. A sense of the historical contingency of our own ideas and sensibilities as well as of our technologies is too often neglected in historical education. Really to understand what it would have been to be a tenth-century or a fifteenth-century or even an early-twentieth-century man ought to be the aim of the study of history. And it is not the least of the objections to the corruption of that study by politics that it makes such an understanding impossible.

Perhaps the great contribution to the Columbus controversy of the quincentenary celebration will prove to be a renewed appreciation of the extent to which it is religion that lies at the heart of that controversy. The most striking document on the anti-Columbian side to date, Kirkpatrick Sale's *The Conquest of Paradise*, is mainly taken up with the reconstruction, out of such scraps and fragments of primitive animism as he can find, of a whole aboriginal American religion of oneness with nature and ecological correctness.[1] This he means to set against Columbus's medieval Catholicism, which has the twin disadvantages of being both swinishly insensitive to nature and much better documented.

And it cannot be denied that Columbus deserves Sale's categorization. In a brilliant article in *The New Republic*, Simon Schama makes the point that at last Columbus's *Libro de las Profecías*, long thought to be "the disordered ravings of a defeated mind," is being given the importance it deserves in understanding him.[2] Far from being the progressive hero he was made out to be in the nineteenth century, the Admiral was really a medieval man. His vision was not of escape from a claustrophobic Ptolemaic universe but of confirming it in its essential details—above all of fulfilling biblical prophecy by bringing the gospel to the heathen. And what he meant by the gospel, it is clear, was much closer to the eschatology of *Christ III* than to either the collection of secular pieties that make up most religion today or Kirkpatrick Sale's nature worship.

It is easy to condemn this sort of religion without recognizing that our condemnation of it is as characteristic of us as the religion itself is of medieval people. Compare, for example, the Anglo-Saxon poet's joy in watching sinners roast in Hell with Graham Greene's ending to his novel *Brighton Rock*. Rose, the heroine, makes her confession to a priest who tries to soothe her fears that her late husband, a terrifyingly heartless gangster, will be damned to Hell. The priest tells her that there once was a man in France who refused the sacraments of the Church on the grounds that, if God would condemn any man to Hell, then his place was in Hell too. "Many people looked on that man as a saint," the priest says. And he adds: "There is no accounting for the appalling *strangeness* of the mercy of God."

We have lost something of the sense of that strangeness in the more than fifty years since *Brighton Rock* was written. Now the Frenchman is obviously the good guy and God with His pettifogging rules (a.k.a. "sacraments") is more than a little suspect Himself. Nothing could seem more strange than burning people in a lake of fire for all eternity. In fact, the very idea of such a place as Hell is all but incomprehensible to the sort of mind that is now culturally dominant in the West. I like to think of that mind's most basic premise as having been articulated by Ron Wiggins, a columnist for *The Palm Beach* (Florida) *Post-Times*, who once disproved Hell's existence by writing that

1 *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*, by Kirkpatrick Sale; Knopf, 384 pages, $24.95.

2 "They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus," by Simon Schama; *The New Republic*, January 6 & 13, 1992, pp. 31-40.

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"If God was *even as nice a guy as I am*, He would never send anybody there."

That we find Graham Greene's priest more appealing than the author of *Christ III*, that God is now the ultimate "nice guy" instead of the terrifying judge with unlimited investigative resources—these things are self-evidently to do with the fact that we were born in the twentieth century rather than the tenth. The difference in sensibility is not unlike that which the great German art historian, Wilhelm Worringer, characterized as that between "abstraction" and "empathy." Abstraction to him was the more primitive and authentic artistic impulse, something associated with the need to express alienation from and control of nature. Empathy comes later in cultural history, when people begin to feel more comfortable and safe within their world. Striving for greater representational accuracy is a way of proclaiming our easy kinship with nature, of internalizing a world that has hitherto been terrifyingly external.

In religious terms this same distinction could apply to the centuries' long transition from the arbitrary and external God whose commandments, rewards, and punishments are handed down on His own terms and with few concessions to human wishes and frailties to the cozy, internalized God who may in the end be nothing more than "the ground of our being." Tillich's phrase sounds at first like a compliment to God, but it is really a compliment to ourselves—as if the power behind the universe had nothing better to do than to serve as the cosmic dirt upon which we found the handsome edifices of our little human lives. An empathetic relation with the universe similarly implies not so much respect for the not-us as the arrogant assumption that we, large-souled creatures that we are, somehow *include* the not-us and can make it our own through our godlike powers of understanding.

My purpose here is not to act as advocate for either abstraction or empathy, either external or internal conceptions of the world. It is rather to point to the fact that someone such as Columbus who lived just on the borderline between the medieval and the early modern cannot be understood, cannot even *begin* to be understood, without our first understanding the difference between his conception of the world and our own. Moreover, what effect his discovery of America had upon the Americans cannot be considered apart from the assumptions that they shared with their conquerors. As Schama writes: "The Taíno vomiting ritual, for example, was the kind of strict ritual practice that devotees of extreme Franciscan forms of mortification might have understood."

The Taíno, those gentle folk whom Columbus first "encountered" in the New World, engaged in the vomiting ritual as a purification before worship, and the worship, so far as we can tell from what survives of the study of their customs undertaken at Columbus's behest by Brother Ramón Pané, has much in common with primitive animist religions the world over. Kirkpatrick Sale clearly considers the propitiation of their weird gods, or *zemis*, to be irrelevant to the higher pantheism he would attribute to them, for he never mentions it. Instead he concludes from their agriculture, domestic architecture, and personal adornment that "they had achieved a means of living in a balanced and fruitful harmony with their natural surroundings that any society might well have envied."

Well, any society except the European, presumably. For just as the Taíno religion is meaningless to Sale apart from its imputed naturalism, so medieval Christianity is meaningless apart from its anti-naturalism. "Europe," he writes, "was estranged from its natural environment and had for several thousand years been engaged in depleting and destroying the lands and waters it depended on, and justifying that with one or another creed or conviction." So much for the law given to Moses! So much for the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection! Like Marxist history, Sale's never suggests that for three thousand years people even *thought* they were doing anything but inventing excuses for robbery and rapine.

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At least the Marxist has a philosophy of history in terms of which his reductivism toward the cultures of the past makes sense. Sale is simply ignorant of the tremendous cultural forces which, like the innocent and guileless Taíno, he is playing with. The conceit that somehow the amalgam of pacifism, ecological concern, and radical egalitarian theory that the modern, multicultural Left has adopted as its own is the equivalent of primitive nature worship is simply brainless. Sale writes that "to have regarded the wild as *sacred*, as do many other cultures around the world, would have been almost inconceivable in medieval Europe—and, if conceived, as some of those called witches found out, certainly heretical and punishable by the Inquisition."

It is true that he attempts in a footnote to patch up the obvious contradiction here by saying that the frequent examples of pagan recrudescence throughout European history were "decidedly minority and largely rural strains, found for the most part in the northern Germanic and Nordic states, and never very influential, at least in mainstream culture," but this won't wash. What were the witch hunts and the Inquisition there for if not precisely because the dominant culture felt itself under threat from the always-powerful impulse for a return to paganism? Only the inquisitors knew what Sale does not: that paganism is a fearful thing.

European Christianity evolved into what it was by Columbus's time precisely because what it meant for the wild to be sacred was still vivid in European folk-memory. You don't worship what you patronize, as the pacifist-ecologist-egalitarian-multiculturalist Left patronizes nature; you worship what you fear. And the fear of nature had to be vanquished by a transcendent religion like Christianity for those who patronize it even to be conceivable. Sale has got things just the wrong way round, and his imputation of anachronistic ecological concerns to defenseless Indians takes no account of the fact that the nature religions that we actually know something about shared with medieval Christianity the assumption that people derive self-justification not from within but from maintenance of a proper condition of vassalage to supernatural powers.

Nothing about the fifteenth century, on either the European or the American side, is as hard to understand as this. Once again, the difficulties become clearer if we compare Columbus and his contemporaries not with people five centuries later but with people five centuries earlier. In a book published nearly thirty years ago called *The Ethos of the Song of Roland*, George Fenwick Jones made an important contribution to such an understanding by analyzing that Old French (really Anglo-Norman) epic for its distinctive outlook on the world—an outlook summed up for many of its modern readers by the repeated line: *Paiens unt tort et chrestiens unt dreit* or "the Saracens are wrong and the Christians are right."

When you think about it, this is a surprising motto for the poem. Wouldn't Charlemagne and his twelve peers, including the incomparable Roland, simply have assumed as much? Isn't this rather like the politically progressive of today chanting, mantra-like, that "environmentalists are right and polluters are wrong"? Well we *know* that, for heaven's sake! And if we don't we're hardly going to be convinced by the chant. The poet of the *Chanson de Roland*, however, was not attempting to inform or persuade but to reinforce an unreasoned and quasi-mystical sense of solidarity between the Christian soldiers and their heavenly liege. "Wrong" and "right" are conceived of not in moral but in mythical terms, as the proclamation of an allegiance rather than an idea.

Yet the words' moral content is latent, as it were, in their adaptation to the more practical purpose of a fight song. The same is true of much of Christian ritual, which may remain unchanged for centuries and yet be understood very differently by congregations at different ends of a time continuum taking mythical or moral points of view. In his book, Jones's purpose is among other things to distinguish between what he calls mythos and ethos and to show that the

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former may be accepted without any real understanding of the latter.

> The way in which men can accept a mythos without the corresponding ethos [writes Jones] is well illustrated in an anecdote about a caravan that was captured by bandits while crossing the Gobi Desert. Knowing the reputation of their captors, all the members of the caravan lost hope, except for one young American missionary still new to the area. Convinced that the poor benighted heathens would see the light if only it were shown to them, he announced to the bandits that he had a tale to tell them. Then, with the aid of an interpreter, he began his story of the creation of heaven and earth, the fall of man, and the trials and tribulations of the children of Israel. Hastening through the birth and miracles of Christ, he stressed His passion, death, and resurrection. Observing the attentive faces of his audience, the young missionary could see that the seed had fallen upon good ground; and, sure enough, the next morning he and his companions were allowed to proceed on their way unmolested. However, the next caravan that attempted to cross the desert was also captured, and its members were crucified, while their captors cast lots for their garments.

If this mythos-over-ethos sort of Christianity was true of the audience of the *Chanson de Roland*, it was also true in varying degrees throughout the Middle Ages. Certainly as late as the sixteenth century the Portuguese poet Camões could write that King João "was the first monarch to go forth from his native land and compel the African to recognize by ordeal of battle how superior is the Christian faith to that of Mahomet." That superiority is obviously not of spiritual or moral insight but of a kind of totemic, magical power: the Portuguese king won the battle, therefore his God was superior.

Columbus and those who came after him to the Americas were a part of this strange and barbaric world (as it must seem to us), and the relative ease with which they were able to oppress and enslave the native populations must have seemed to them evidence (if evidence were needed) of the superiority of their religion to that of the conquered peoples. Perhaps more important, it must have seemed evidence of the same thing to the conquered peoples themselves, who would in all probability have shared their conquerors' belief in a divinity whose job it was to prove his superiority to the competition by success as a totem in battle.

Not that there were not important differences between medieval Christianity and the sort of primitive, animist religions celebrated by Kirkpatrick Sale. But even if we allow for the fact that Sale sees those religions, with the help of their exiguous documentary record, through the eyes of a late-twentieth-century man, even if we allow for the additional fact that he never mentions the extraordinary cruelties and human sacrifices demanded by the much better documented religions of pre-Columbian Central America, even if we admit that at least some of the American aboriginals were much closer to Ron Wiggins's idea of a nice guy than Columbus was, or even than most fifteenth-century Spaniards were, there is a much greater difference between Sale and the Indians than between the Indians and Columbus.

And even if we ignore that fact and grant Sale his gentle, pacifist, ecologically minded natives, the question remains: Are we saying anything meaningful, in historical or anthropological terms, when we compare two cultures only in terms of how closely they resemble our own? It seems to me more productive to consider the extent to which Columbus's beliefs were, just as ours are, culturally contingent. What it is possible for anyone to believe depends on what his culture has prepared him to believe, and this is true without prejudice to the question of whether or not some beliefs are absolutely true or false. We, who find it so easy to internalize what we experience of God, nature, and other people, to make it our own property, must make a real effort of imagination in order to understand what it is like not to feel that comfortable sense of em-

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pathy with all the universe which we so parochially take for granted.

The National Gallery's approach to the Columbus anniversary was to mount an exhibition called "Circa 1492," which offered a Cook's tour of world cultures around the turn of the sixteenth century.[3] There was some logic to the division of the world, like Caesar's Gaul, into three parts, "Europe and the Mediterranean World," "Toward Cathay," and "The Americas," since Columbus left I on his way to II and arrived at III. As experienced, however, it left the viewer bewildered about what these relics of China, India, Korea, Japan, Africa, and the Middle East have to do with Columbus. The answer is nothing, unless you take it all as a kind of belated atonement for Columbus's fabled ethnocentrism. We celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of his voyage with a multiculturalist feast, the high-brow equivalent of the Disneyland pageant "It's a Small World After All."

Except that it isn't. Interestingly, the exhibition catalogue ends with an essay by J. H. Elliott, titled "A World United," which quotes the words of a son of Saint Francis Borgia on being given a globe by his father: "Before seeing it, I had not realized how small the world is." That realization has been the excited discovery of youthful and superficial minds from that day to this. Of course if you ignore all the ways in which the nations and cultures of the world are different, as it is easy to do when you don't know much about them, the world does look pretty small. It looks bigger with the sort of intellectual maturity that seems to elude the multiculturalist consensus.

"Circa 1492" is a case in point. Its cross-sectional look at world cultures at a given moment in time was trivial in conception and largely incoherent in execution. It isn't that we can learn nothing from the contemplation of what happens to be going on at different places at the same time; it's that we can learn so much more from what went on at the same place at different times. What separates Columbus from ourselves presents a much more difficult intellectual problem than what separated him from his contemporaries in the far corners of the world. The latter difference is apparent but at the same time without significance; the former difference is harder to discover but full of significance, both for us and for Columbus.

Where the exhibition offered some real insight was in the contrast it presented between the artifacts of Renaissance Europe and pre-Columbian America. It was the contrast between empathy and abstraction. We could see in the European section the well-known movement away from the stylized, rather Byzantine images of the earlier Middle Ages toward the accurately representational depictions of man and nature which Worringer associates with empathy. The art of the contemporary Americas, on the other hand, had the abstract, geometric, and highly stylized quality characteristic of the primitive and totemic.

It is not necessary to take a Whiggish view of artistic history to see the alienness of these pre-Columbian grotesques. By comparison, the European images already possess that power of universality which was shortly and so unfortunately for the native cultures to be translated into political terms. One of the most moving objects in the exhibition was the pair of illustrations dating from about a century after Columbus by a native artist trained in the European style. The two ink-and-watercolor drawings of Nezahualcoyotl and Nezahualpilli from the Bibliothèque Nationale are, as the catalogue says, "decidedly awkward," but they stand out like familiar faces in a crowd of strangers.

It is not just that we find it easier to "read" the European-style image, although we do. More important is the fact that that is the image which makes multiculturalism and

3 "Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration" was on view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., from October 12, 1991, through January 12, 1992. For an account of the European part of the exhibition, see Creighton Gilbert's "A Celebrated Age" in *The New Criterion*, January 1992, pp. 45-48.

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all forms of imaginative participation in other cultures possible. The totemic figures of the pre-Columbian which surround it forever exclude us, however well we understand them intellectually, for their emotional resonance, now vanished, depended on a closed cultural system. Kirkpatrick Sale's sentimentalism about Indian nature worship is the product of equal parts ignorance of primitive cultural constraints and the imaginative capacity afforded him by his own culture to escape from those constraints.

His book censures European culture, in the words of J. H. Elliott again, for failing "even to make the effort to come to terms with a world other than its own." Yet the same charge could be leveled at Sale himself and all those multiculturalists for whom the past is a foreign country of which they are determined to remain ignorant. Like the early modern Europeans when they first "encountered" the Western Hemisphere, they are too often limited to one of two responses to this foreignness: sentimentalism about noble savages (then) or ecologically minded pacifists (now); or blanket condemnation of whole cultures for not living up to somebody else's standards. Let them learn from their own prescription to the Columbians and see the unknown land with eyes of empathy.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

Art & politics in Vichy France *by Hilton Kramer*
Trollope today *by Roger Kimball*
The sculpture of Gaston Lachaise *by Karen Wilkin*
The Edna St. Vincent Millay centenary *by Mary Jo Salter*
Penelope Fitzgerald's "Gate of Angels" *by Bruce Bawer*
The New York of Dawn Powell *by Lauren Weiner*
Jon Wiener's pop chronicles *by Ron Radosh*

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Letters

Partisan passions

To the Editors:

Three articles in your November issue are symptomatic of the way *The New Criterion*'s partisan passions override scrupulous writing and editing.

Hilton Kramer makes a tendentious case that Orwell intended *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to be a univocal attack on Communist totalitarianism. How does Kramer account for Orwell's 1949 statement against this interpretation, dictated to his English publisher, which concludes, "The name suggested in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is of course Ingsoc, but in practice a wide range of choices is open. In the USA the phrase 'Americanism' or 'hundred per cent Americanism' is suitable and the qualifying adjective is as totalitarian as anyone could wish"? (Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, page 566)

And what does Kramer make of the following key passages from Goldstein's book in the novel, which evidently represent Orwell's own (albeit hyperbolic) analysis of the Cold War between three world powers roughly corresponding to the USSR, China, and the Anglo-American-Western European bloc?

> Actually the three philosophies are barely distinguishable, and the social systems which they support are not distinguishable at all. Everywhere there is the same pyramidal structure, the same worship of a semi-divine leader, the same economy existing by and for continuous warfare. . . . So long as they remain in conflict they prop one another up, like three sheaves of corn. . . .
>
> The war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects, and the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact.

And earlier:

> War is a way of shattering to pieces, or pouring into the stratosphere, or sinking in the depths of the sea, materials which might otherwise be used to make the masses too comfortable, and hence, in the long run, too intelligent. Even when weapons of war are not actually destroyed, their manufacture is still a convenient way of expending labor power without producing anything that can be consumed.

Whether right or wrong, Orwell surely was close to recent leftists' view of Cold War America as dependent on a permanent war economy perpetuated in the self-interest of a ruling elite.

Bruce Bawer's review of James Campbell's book on James Baldwin calls it "the first full biography." What about W. J. Weatherby's 467-page *James Baldwin: Artist on Fire* (Dell, 1989)? Bawer curiously skims over *The Fire Next Time*—universally recognized as Baldwin's greatest book—in three sentences, one of which is misleading. Bawer implies that a quotation from the conclusion of that book's second edition, "a denunciation of religions that preach hate," refers to the Black Muslims. The section this quote concludes is in fact a denunciation of the historical perversions of Christianity into a mask for white racism and imperialism as well as for black self-hatred. *The Fire Next Time* was seminal for the recent left-

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ist critique of Eurocentrism that conservatives abhor. Could it be that the failure of Bawer or any other conservative critic I know of to refute Baldwin's arguments therein is tacit testimony to their validity?

Finally, the author of "Notes & Comments" (does one hear Roger Kimball's whiny voice?) claims, "It goes without saying that the attention accorded by the press to the National Association of Scholars and other critics of political correctness cannot compare with the sympathetic coverage that the media has bestowed on the academic Left." Such a claim could go without saying only by someone who has been in hibernation for the past year or so and missed the epidemic of articles bashing leftist PC in *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Time*, *The New Republic*, *Reader's Digest*, *The Atlantic*, *New York*, *Society*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Washington Post*, and the op-ed pages of virtually every newspaper in the country, not to speak of all the publications overtly in the conservative camp.

The author further comments that *The New York Times*'s "friendly" front-page coverage of the founding of Teachers for a Democratic Culture is "something that has never been done for the professors who organized the National Association of Scholars." Well, it is true that Joseph Berger's equally friendly article on the first major meeting of the NAS, in the November 13, 1989, *Times*, only appeared on page 22, but isn't it plausible that any skirmish in this academic war is a bigger story now than it was then, thanks largely to the sensation-seeking efforts of NAS, Kimball, and their allies on the Olin Foundation circuit?

In listing the *Times*'s recent stories sympathetic to academic lefties, the author conveniently forgets the many unsympathetic (and often error-filled) *Times* articles by Berger, Richard Bernstein, James Atlas, and others, along with the numerous op-eds by conservatives like Gertrude Himmelfarb, Arthur Gold, and Norman Cantor. (See my "Literary Revisionism, Partisan Politics, and the Press" in the MLA's *Profession 89* and my exchange with Herbert London of NAS in *Profession 90*.)

If the editors of *The New Criterion* had been interested in doing some honest research instead of grinding their ideological axe, they would have taken the trouble to enumerate the recent articles on opposing sides of the PC controversy, as *Propaganda Review* did in its Fall 1991 issue, finding the large majority on the conservative side.

Donald Lazere
Department of English
Cal Poly State University
San Luis Obispo, CA

Bruce Bawer replies:

Mr. Lazere is right about Campbell's book being the second, not the first, full Baldwin biography. (I am eager to hear his explanation of how *The New Criterion*'s "partisan passions" led me to commit this error.) But he is either mistaken or disingenuous about Baldwin's line in *The Fire Next Time*, which reads as follows: "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of him." This means simply what it says. Baldwin's book makes it clear that he saw this passage as applying both to Christians like his father, who twisted Christ's message of love into one of racial hate, and to Black Muslims, whose message is explicitly one of racial hate. Yes, the two sentences come at the end of a section (the first, not the second, as I mistakenly said in my piece) largely concerned with Baldwin's Pentecostal childhood and youth, but they immediately precede the beginning of his account of the Black Muslims, and the words are clearly intended to point in both directions, toward certain people who call themselves Christians and toward the Black Muslim movement. Mr. Lazere, like many English professors today, would seem to be so preoccupied with categories of race and class and with politically correct ideas of what's good and what's bad (Black Muslims good, Christians bad) that he has trouble accepting the idea that hate is hate.

I am sorry that Mr. Lazere found my treatment of *The Fire Next Time* too brief. My aim was to focus on Baldwin as artist and not as pamphleteer; what concerned me most about his politics was that they damaged him as an artist. I approached Baldwin as a literary critic and not (as Mr. Lazere labels me) a political conservative—though, of course, to write about art as art and not as politics nowadays makes one automatically a conservative, doesn't it?

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"The Museum Transformed"

To the Editors:
In response to Hilton Kramer's article "Has Success Spoiled the Art Museum?" (September 1991), perhaps you will permit me to correct the author's overwhelming misinterpretation of my book, *The Museum Transformed*, in order that your readers, many of whom will never get their hands on it, will not labor under the delusion that I do not care about the art object or the means by which it is displayed.

This is a fairly repetitive criticism delivered by Mr. Kramer at what he perceives to be "leftist" artists or writers, as well as those he identifies with an "avant-garde" that presumably perished some decades ago, if we are to believe him and Robert Hughes, his acolyte. Far worse, it is a critique occasionally indulged by more moderate and reasonable sensibilities—to wit, Arthur Danto, who, in a recent review, far more positive than Mr. Kramer's, actually accused me of siding with R. Hughes in a lamentation over high prices paid at auction for "original works of art."

God, no. I cannot wait for the day when $1,000,000,000 (that is, a fraction of the cost of a single stealth bomber) will be paid for almost any work of high, serious art.

Perhaps my sentiments in this matter are not known simply because critics like Mr. Kramer disagree with me not over the sanctity of the object but over which works are in fact precious. Mr. Kramer lusts after certain objects, I lust after others, for which no price and no mode of preservation or display, however high, is good enough. I remember once finding myself in awe in the basement of the Philadelphia Museum of Art when several trunks of original Duchamps arrived. Had Mr. Kramer been there, he might have taken an axe to them. I would have resisted him with every ounce of blood at my command. Now let me quote from *The Museum Transformed* more accurately than Mr. Kramer did:

> We bid for art, more of us than ever before, to escape life. Failing time and again, we keep on paying, in pursuit of a goal that is clearly beyond price.

These are hardly the words of a man indifferent to the care and preservation of art objects. I extend this care to the newer media I work in, that is, film, video, and the photographic documentation of performance art. Mr. Kramer, I am sure, does not. He would destroy everything I love. Perhaps I would destroy all—or at least a part—of what he loves. That is what makes the world go round.

Douglas Davis
New York, NY

Hilton Kramer replies:
It may come as news to critics such as Douglas Davis, but the fact is that dreaming of destroying works of art beloved by others but not by oneself is not, fortunately, "what makes the world go round." It is, however, a mark of Mr. Davis's incapacity to discuss the subject of the art museum with even a minimum of intelligence that he should think this an amusing way to talk about the matter. Reading his letter, I can see now that my criticism of *The Museum Transformed* did not go nearly far enough. It is a comfort, however, to know that his letter is more damaging to his reputation than anything I wrote about his book.

Marxism & the young

To the Editors:
I am prompted by your latest example of mind-numbing, stomach-turning academic prose (that of the amazing Professor Drucilla Cornell ["Notes & Comments," December 1991]) and your quote from Professor Stanley "Piranha" Fish in praise of this tripe, as well as by Bruce Bawer's wonderfully scathing review of the awful *Columbia History of the American Novel*, to offer a new analysis of the reasons behind the rise of Marxists in the American academy.

The usual cause cited, by Roger Kimball and others, is true enough: the ascent of Sixties and Seventies radicals to tenured positions. This argument does not take account, however, of the prevalence of Marxists among new professors and graduate students, who of course are the Tenured Radicals of tomorrow. Nor does it take account of the astonishing popularity of these radicals among undergraduates, who swell enroll-

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ments in the latest Claptrap 101 courses hammering away at their Holy Trinity of Race, Class, and Gender.

What those of us sickened by these developments, and by the accompanying decline in standards of aesthetic judgment, prose style, and so on, have failed to note is that Marxism *sells briskly to the young and ignorant.* It appeals to their traditional and inevitable rebelliousness against their parents; it satisfies their adolescent sense of victimization; and it soothes, if they are white, their adolescent burden of guilt. It is simple, requiring very little intellectual effort and absolutely no subtlety. Like aerobics or channeling, anyone can do it. And not least of all, it appeals to the natural adolescent inclination toward Utopianism. For all these reasons—and this is the telling point—enrollments in liberal-arts classes have soared since the Marxists started taking over. For this reason it also appeals to, or at least is tolerated by, administrators and trustees nervous about keeping the tuition flowing in.

The MTV/Nintendo Generation does not read books, cannot write, and has an attention span the duration of a sound-bite. When they find that all they have to do in a class is sound variations on the litany of Race, Class, and Gender—and have their resentments titillated and their romantic social fantasies stimulated into the bargain—of course they sign up in droves.

If I may add a personal anecdote, let me urge you not to ignore the social sciences when you attack in a lonely voice the collapse of academic standards. Recently a Princeton undergraduate, who is writing his senior thesis on economic and social aspects of American publishing—he is a sociology major—interviewed me. He asked me how I dealt with being forced by my publishers to write what they demanded of me and how I felt about being exploited as a "worker" by ravenous multinational corporations.

I insisted to the student that I write exactly what I want to write, that no publisher has ever censored any of my writings, that I find my own subjects—whether fiction or nonfiction—through memory and personal contacts, and that far from feeling exploited, I am happy to make a decent living from writing. I tried to explain how publishers take considerable capital risk by giving me advances and that it is only if people, most of them women, stop reading my books that I'll be in trouble—which to me seems fair enough. I also said that if a publisher tried to cheat me, my agent would arrange to sue him or her.

I am not sure that this was what the student wanted to hear. I asked him why and how he came to formulate his questions in what seemed to me to be such Marxist clichés. "Most of my professors are Marxists," he said simply.

Darcy O'Brien
Tulsa, OK

P.S.: Robert Mezey's translations of the Borges poems (December 1991) are wonderful. Your readers may be interested to know that Pomona College, where Mr. Mezey has taught for seventeen years, and where I once was a tenured malcontent, has never granted Mr. Mezey tenure. Why? He doesn't have a Ph.D. As I recall, R. P. Blackmur didn't even have a high-school diploma. Yes, everything has gotten worse. Mr. Mezey's new work will, of course, do him no academic good, since Borges is politically incorrect, a corrupt aesthete, a dandy, dead, and white, or nearly.

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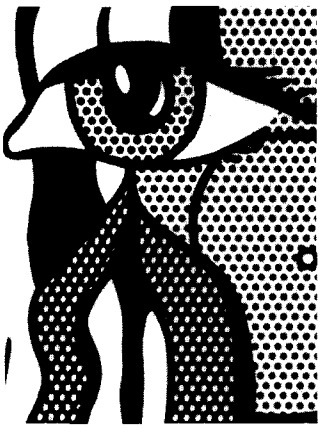

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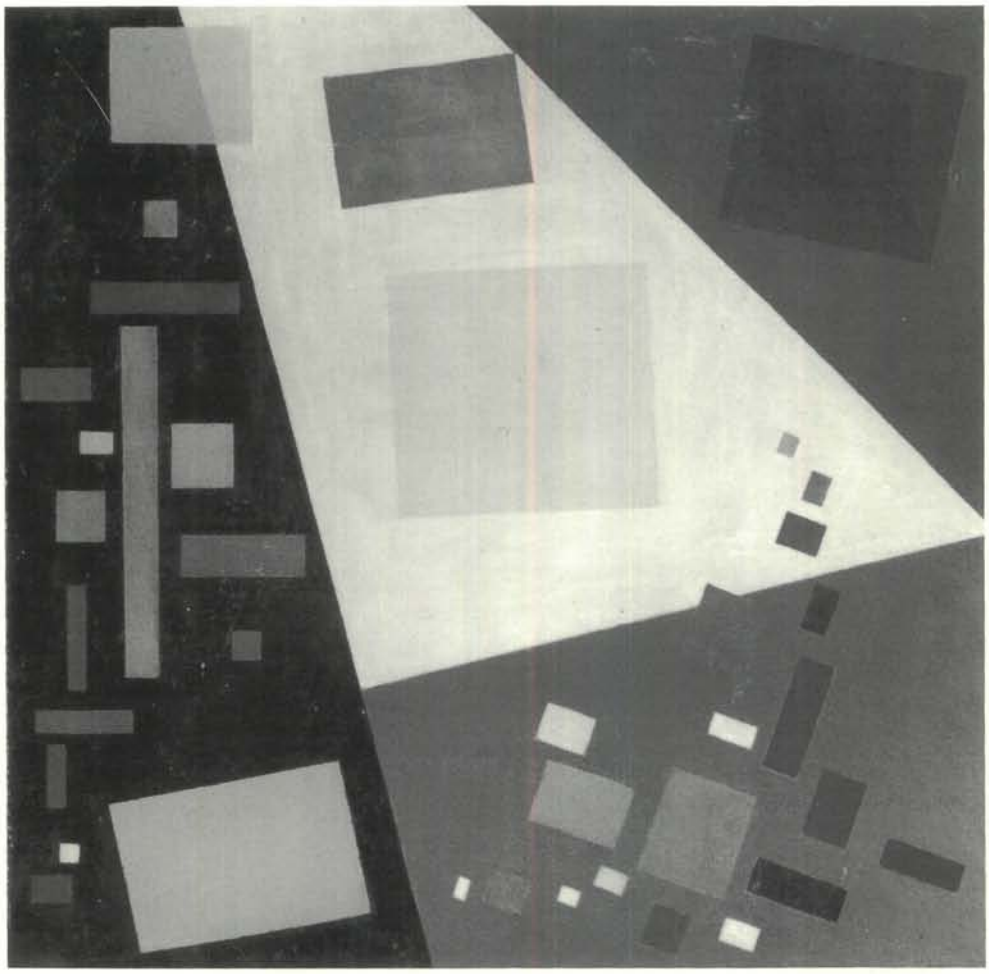

Alice Trumbull Mason, The Juggler, 1950, oil on board, 20 x 19 ½ inches.

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